## ALAMITOS HEIGHTS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

Celebrating 100 Years of Service to the Community

December 2023

## 35th Colorado Lagoon Holiday Tree Lighting



Holiday Trees in the Colorado Lagoon

Lighting the floating holiday trees in the Colorado Lagoon the day after thanksgiving has been a cherished tradition in Alamitos heights since 1988. This year was the 35th anniversary of the tradition and it was the biggest and best celebration yet!

Taking advantage of the newly renovated Colorado Lagoon playground, the celebration was moved from the lifeguard station with great effect. AHIA put up lights and inflatables to illuminate the new playground so that kids could play while the Wilson High School Carolers sang holiday songs! Curtis Heard, Choir Director at Wilson High School, led his Carolers for over an hour as they serenaded neighbors to ring in the holidays!

A big thank you goes out to Steve Pruitt, co-founder of Friends of Recreation Park Bandshell, for providing the Wilson High School Carolers with a wonderful stage to perform from looking out over the new playground and renovated lagoon!



Charlie and Rennee Nicholas as Mr. and Mrs. Clause greet neighborhood children

## 35th Annual Colorado Lagoon Holiday Tree Lighting



Curtis Heard and the Wilson High School Carolers were back with some wonderful songs to delight neighbors and spread the holiday spirit!

Gary Frantz with GDC Communications & Sounds was back again for his 12th year supporting AHIA with light and sound for our neighborhood celebration. A retired LBPD Officer, this is a labor of love for Gary who enjoys seeing the children come together for the celebration and to meet Santa!

Ubuntu Café and Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf partnered up to provide hot chocolate! Fellippe Esteves, owner of Ubuntu Café, and Roy Langford with CBTL provide 40 gallons of hot cocoa for guests and next year we plan to have even more!



Danny, Manny, and the team from the Long Beach Marine Beauro who set up the Colorado Lagoon Holiday Trees and make the lighting happen!

Lazy Acres Natural Market and Belmont Heights Community Association also jumped in to provide more than 600 cookies for our event!

The Port of Long Beach, 3rd District Councilmember Kristina Duggan, and Costanza Genoese Zerbi from Redfin provided financial support to help make this event possible.

Finally, a big thank you to Danny, Manny, and the team from the Long Beach Marine Bureau who worked hard setting up the Colorado Lagoon Holiday Trees and then staying late to switch on the power after our countdown to make the lighting happen!



Long Beach Fire Station #4 gave Santa and Mrs. Clause a ride this year while our own Station #14 is closed for renovation.

The trees are approximately 18' high with more than 300 lights each and take several weeks to deploy. Please don't try to board a raft, as doing so is a serious health hazard.

The tradition of floating holiday trees began in 1949 when Don May, a prominent restaurant owner of the well-known Leilani Hut located on 2nd Street, put a Christmas tree on a raft and pushed it onto Alamitos Bay. A few years later, in 1953, the pyramid-design tree was introduced and remains the model today.

### Local student, Liam Moses, sets out to plant 1,000 trees



Standing next to one of the trees they planted along 6th Street are (Left to Right) Liam Moses, Nico Ara, Reba Ara, and Terri Moses

Have you noticed the young trees on the south side of 6th Street along the golf course? They are the direct result of a local high school student's initiative.

After exposure to the Al Gore Climate Reality Leadership Corps, Liam started the Carroll Park Climate Challenge and began working with his neighbors to adopt climate friendly practices. That led to the ambitious goal of planting 1,000 trees in Long Beach as part of a project called Urban Trees Long Beach, which supports funding, planting and caring for trees in our city.

Liam then pulled together dozens of kids from Youth Leadership Long Beach to help plant the trees along 6th street on March 5, 2022.

The parkway strip is a "no man's land," outside of Parks and Rec's jurisdiction and within no other, so Liam and fellow high school senior Nico Ara, along with their families have been single handedly maintaining the trees! They researched, acquired, and installed (including trench digging) special slow-release watering bags for each tree.

For over a year and a half, every single Sunday, these devoted families form a bucket brigade to refill the water bags. Each tree has a name, among them Bobby Jones (founder of the Masters Tournament), Maurice Flitcroft (the world's worst golfer look it up), Dorothy, Marley, James T. Kirk, and Margaritaville (a magnolia, one of the few survivors from an earlier planting that was not supported with irrigation).

Liam is currently at UCLA studying Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences and continues to tend the trees when on break.



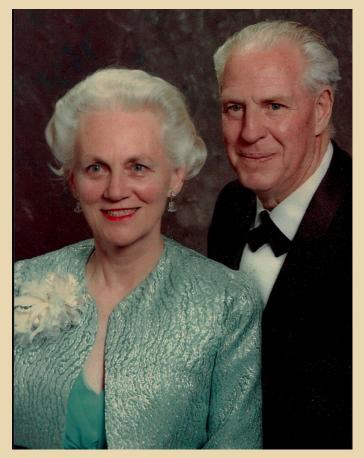
Kelly Kulek at 605 Winslow Ave. with the team from Conservation Corps of Long Beach who helped plant five new Brisbane Box trees in front of her house

Alamitos Heights Improvement Association has also been busy planting trees this year in celebration of 100 years of service to the community.

The neighborhood has lost several of the Magnolia trees that were originally planted here to tuliptree scale. To address this issue, AHIA Board Members, Catherine Grace, Leslie Grenie, and Maria Kisska worked hard to secure a grant from The Port of Long Beach to plant trees for any neighbor who wanted one.

If you would like to have AHIA help plant a tree in front of your house, or if you have a tree along the street that is dead or dying and need help getting it removed, please reach out to president@ahia.info.

## Celebrating the Life of Virginia Lee Benedict A Pillar of Alamitos Heights



Virginia & Luther Benedict, March 3, 1973

A pioneer of Alamitos Heights, the life of Virginia Lee Benedict is one of resilience, community spirit, and a deep commitment to family and neighbors.

Virginia's family moved to Long Beach when she was just 2 years old. Growing up in Long Beach, Virginia attended Washington Junior High School and later Polytechnic High School. It was during these formative years that she first crossed paths with Luther Benedict, a fellow student who would become her lifelong partner.

After finishing High School, Virginia's educational journey took her to the University of Oregon, where she pursued a course in law. However, the challenges of the Great Depression forced her to suspend her studies. Luther completed his education at the University of Arizona.

Returning to Long Beach, Virginia and Luther reconnected and were married on April 7th, 1931. Luther, an entrepreneur, delved into various ventures, from rolling chalk for artist Harry Linder and running "Dog Carts" at The Pike before college to owning a trucking business early in his marriage.

In 1935, the Benedicts embarked on building their first home at 378 Havana in Alamitos Heights. In the 1930s, the area was mostly open land. In fact, the banks would not loan money to purchase here because it was in the middle of the oil fields. There were no homes across the street, and this was the first house built south of 4th Street on Havana. The construction of their house, a labor of love undertaken by Luther himself, became a symbol of their shared dreams and commitment to one another.

Luther, who faced hearing loss due to ear infections from his water polo days at Long Beach Poly, played a vital role during World War II as a welder in the Long Beach shipyards. Virginia also did her part to support the war effort, serving as a Grey Lady at the VA from 1946 to 47. The Benedict home at 378 Havana also played a unique role during World War II, hosting a radar installation due to its unobstructed view toward Catalina.



Virginia Lee Benedict Grove Marine Stadium Park, dedicated 11/5/1983

## Celebrating the Life of Virginia Lee Benedict A Pillar of Alamitos Heights



Long Beach Press Telegram, Friday, January 26, 1951: Mayor Approves! "The free band concert for children sponsored tomorrow by the Junior League of Long Beach has my full-hearted support and I hope every child in Long Beach will be there" said mayor Burton Chace when visited in City Hall by Mrs. Luther Benedict, league president, and her daughter, Mary Belle. Shown reading the "Come Hear the Band" poster are Mayor Chace, Edward Todd, Mrs. Benedict and Mary Belle.

Notably, Luther also constructed a home for his mother, Belle LaBar Benedict, at 642 Havana Ave, a house that now serves as a cherished residence for his daughter Mary and her husband Bryan Nevill.

Virginia and Luther's commitment to hard work and community involvement extended beyond their family, leaving an indelible mark on Alamitos Heights. As a lifetime member beginning in 1944, Virginia made significant contributions to the Junior League of Long Beach and served as President (1950-51). As Children's Dental Foundation President (1965-68), she played an important role in creating a new home for the Children's Dental Health Clinic within Miller Children's Hospital. She also Rancho Cerritos supported Los in establishing a gift shop.

Virginia's contributions to the community continued through the 1970s with her work on the Alamitos Heights Improvement Association and as a member of the original Local Coastal Plan Committee which determined how Long Beach would protect and preserve our precious coastal resources and created Marina Vista Park. When Virginia died in 1982, the Long Beach City Council passed a resolution to recognize her work through the Virginia Lee Benedict Memorial Grove in Marina Vista Park, which you can see today near the tennis courts.

The Benedicts' story is interwoven with the fabric of Alamitos Heights, a tale of resilience, community service, and enduring love. As we celebrate the life of Virginia Lee Benedict, let us also reflect on the enduring legacy she and Luther have left, shaping the very essence of the neighborhood we hold dear.



Long Beach Press Telegram, February 1951: Donuts for Donors. Junior League members and their husbands made a lark out of donating blood at the Red Cross weekly blood bank Tuesday evening. Reaching for donuts after they had given their pint are (left to right) Dr. Kenneth Lightbody, Williams H. Niver, Virginia Benedict, Luther Benedict and Mrs. Lightbody. Virginia Benedict, president of the Junior League of Long Beach, said the group plans to continue blood donations for patriotic purposes and to make blood available when needed by members and families.

### Alamitos Heights Improvement Association 2023 Year in Review



More than 300 children attended this year's Easter Egg Hunt at the Red Car Greenbelt on 4th Street and Park Ave. hosted by AHIA and BHCA

In Alamitos Heights, 2023 proved to be a bustling year, with AHIA taking proactive steps to address various neighborhood concerns. The association played a crucial role in navigating challenges, ranging from traffic issues linked to the ongoing Colorado Lagoon Open Channel Project to the beautification of the Manila Median through tree planting.

The action-packed year commenced on February 22nd when neighbors Steve and Priscilla Hockett hosted a front yard meeting. In attendance were 3rd District Councilmember Duggan, Commander Richens of the Long Beach Police



A city-conducted traffic study prompted the installation of speed bumps along 6th Street, spanning from Park Ave. to Santiago Ave.

Department, and Paul Van Dyk from Public Works. The focus was on the escalating traffic concerns along 6th Street and throughout Alamitos Heights due to the Colorado Lagoon project. With more than 30 neighbors present, a collaborative effort ensued. Resident feedback and a city-conducted traffic study prompted the installation of speed bumps along 6th Street, spanning from Park Ave. to Santiago Ave.

Building on the momentum generated by the traffic study, AHIA organized a Community Meeting at the Greek Orthodox Church in April. Commander Richens addressed resident concerns about traffic enforcement, accompanied by Commander



Alamitos Heights neighbors enjoy some Naples Rib Company BBQ and a chance to chat with 3rd District Councilperson Kristina Duggan

Shaleana Benson and Chief of Staff Nick Kaspar from Council District 3. This informative session, lasting over an hour, facilitated an open dialogue with concerned neighbors.

April also saw AHIA collaborating with the Belmont Heights Community Association (BHCA) to co-host an Easter Egg Hunt at the Red Car Greenbelt on 4th Street and Park Ave. The event, covered by the Press-Telegram, attracted over 300 children from Lowell and Fremont Elementary.

## Alamitos Heights Improvement Association 2023 Year in Review



Children decorate "mini pumpkins" at the AHIA booth during Goblins on the Green Belt.

The success of the event was captured by Marcel Bonyuet, a 5th Grade student at Lowell Elementary, declaring it the "Best Egg Hunt EVER!" The Easter celebration also included a thorough cleanup of the Red Car Greenbelt.

Moving into June, AHIA continued its community engagement by hosting the annual neighborhood picnic. Drawing a crowd of over 250 neighbors, the event featured delicious food from the Naples Rib Company, an arts and craft fair, music, games, and the popular AHIA Cornhole Championship. Special recognition was given to the dedicated Picnic Committee, including Lee Ostendorf, Maria Kisska, and Melissa Sipowicz.



Gary & Sally Meyerhofer host a Wine Down Friday for neighbors at their house on 515 Ultimo Ave.

As fall approached, AHIA organized a Back to School/Pre-Holiday Cleanup for neighbors. The Toss-Shred-Recycle Event, complete with a shredding truck and a 40-yard dumpster, provided an opportunity for residents to dispose of bulky items like old mattresses, wood, furniture, and appliances.



A spooky "Mummy Pumpkin" was one of the crafts organized by AHIA Board Member Annette Dhein

Throughout the year, AHIA consistently fostered a sense of community with numerous Wine Down Fridays. These popular events, aimed at "Creating Community," offer neighbors a chance to unwind after a long week and connect with new people.

If you are interested in hosting a Wine Down Friday event in 2024 please email us at president@ahia.info. AHIA provides a stipend to help pay for water and snacks and will help you setup your event!

## With Special Thanks to our 2023 Members

This year, our Alamitos Heights Improvement Association (AHIA) celebrated 100 years of service to the community! In 1923, the focus of AHIA was to beautify our neighborhood. In those days oil wells dominated the landscape. Our neighborhood logo of an oil well turning into a Royal Palm symbolizes this focus on cleaning up the land and beautifying our community.

Over the years, the focus of AHIA has expanded. Our current mission statement is, "Creating Community Together." To achieve this mission AHIA hosts an annual Easter Egg Hunt, Neighborhood Picnic, Toss-Shred-Recycle Event, and our Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony at the Colorado Lagoon with Santa! We also host two Community Meetings at the Greek Orthodox Church every year so neighbors can hear about issues that impact our community. Additionally, we host dozens of Wine Down Friday gatherings during the year which provide an easy and casual way to stay connected to your neighbors.



All of these activities are made possible by your annual AHIA memberships and the donations and contributions of our local business partners and sponsors. Thank you for being part of AHIA!

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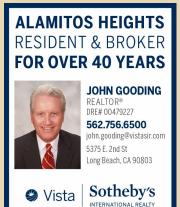
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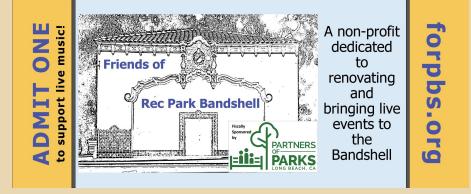
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## 2024 Membership Drive Starts Now Please Renew or Join Today!

501 (c) 4 Non Profit Organization | EIN #95-3537230 Website: ahia.info

Membership in the AHIA runs January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024. Your support of the AHIA is a direct investment into maintaining and improving the quality of life in our vibrant Alamitos Heights community.

Questions? Contact our membership chairperson, Annette Dhein, at membership@ahia.info.

THANK YOU in advance for your support!

### 2024 Calendar of Events

- March: Community Meeting
- April: Easter Egg Hunt
- June: Neighborhood Picnic
- Sep: Toss/Shred/Recycle
- Oct: Goblins on the Greenbelt
- Nov: Lagoon Tree Lighting

**PayPal** 

• Dec: Holiday Decorating Contest

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