

Huntington Beach comes of age

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Redevelopment

*Once just a beach town,
Orange County's third largest city develops its commercial
and industrial potential*

By D.K. Knapp

For most Southern Californians, Huntington Beach means an 8.5-mile strip of spectacular beachfront and a pier just south of Long Beach on the Pacific Coast Highway.

Like most beach communities, the town conjures up a series of sun-drenched images: golden boys surfing throughout an endless summer; surfers slicing suicidally between the concrete pilings of an 1,830-foot recreational pier; tanned or tanning bodies gleaming on the sand; hordes of campers, trailers and pickups parked in the long lots at Bolsa Chica and Huntington State beaches; portables blaring Top 40 tunes; birdwatchers toting binoculars; wary mothers and wading infants; young couples and senior retirees; bikinis and beer.

Despite such images, however, Huntington Beach does possess its own sense of self and its own distinctive identity. Consider these statistics:

- ✓Huntington Beach, population 180,000, is the third largest city in Orange County, 11th largest in California and the 71st largest in the U.S.

- ✓The assessed value of the city's real property is in the neighborhood of \$7 billion.

- ✓More than 900 companies employ some 40,000 workers here.

- ✓Huntington Beach's 1985-86 municipal budget is a whopping \$100 million.

- ✓Once a 3.6-acre seashore stop, the city now comprises 28 square miles, 55 public parks, more than 30 neighborhood shopping centers, three golf courses, scores of tennis courts and swimming pools (72 of the former, five of the latter public), two country clubs and a private yacht club.

- ✓An estimated 10 million visitors drive through the city each year.

- ✓Some 22,000 barrels of oil are pumped from beneath the city and nearby ocean floor each day. In addition, tankers of oil are sent streaming inland to storage facilities each month through a submarine pipeline hookup a mile southwest of the pier.

- ✓Some 30,000 to 50,000 vehicles a day snake their way through the city's mid-section on Beach Boulevard, a thorough-

fare that manages to accommodate just about any service business imaginable.

✓An estimated \$160 million worth of industrial and commercial construction has gone up in Huntington Beach during the past five years. The city's planning and development experts project an additional \$500 million in construction for the next five years.

Snugly encapsuled by the San Diego Freeway on the east, the town of Seal Beach on the north, the Santa Ana River on the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west, Huntington Beach has, in a word, come of age when no one was looking.

"This used to be a sleepy little seashore town," says City Councilman Jack Kelly. "But not any more." Kelly, a 14-year resident of "The Beach" and professional actor (on TV's "Maverick"), served as its mayor in 1983-84.

Referring to the city's image as a bedroom community, Kelly adds, "We've got enough bedrooms now. More of them aren't going to help this city keep pace with its needs. Commercial development—wisely planned, of course—will provide a much bigger tax base with far less drain on public services."

Commercial/industrial space

At first glance, more industrial and commercial space seems to have been the main target of development in Huntington Beach during the past few years. For example:

Nearly a million square feet of commercial space at the 58-acre Huntington Center sits next to the San Diego Freeway at Beach Boulevard. But, says City Principal Redevelopment Planner Mike Adams, "A new Mervyn's will soon (October) join the center's other department stores. In all, 125,000 square feet of commercial space will be added to the complex, and additional expansion is also planned for the future."

Nearby, Adams points out, a 619,000-square-foot, partially built project called One Pacific Plaza currently houses two restaurants, two six-story office buildings and a four-story medical building. Con-

struction has also begun on an eight-story, 224-room Holiday Inn at the site, and another proposed 12-story office building of nearly 200,000 square feet has just been designed.

The 68-acre Oakview project, a redevelopment of an old, run-down residential area, will eventually offer additional low-rise restaurants and retail shops, a Holiday Health Spa, a five-plex cinema and a parking structure. The Oakview Redevelopment Project area houses the recently completed Chartre Center, a striking glass-enclosed 14-story office building surrounded by four restaurants and 210,000 square feet of commercial space, as well as the proposed Koledo Lane Redevelopment Plan (essentially a renovation of post-World War II apartment buildings). It will contain four- and five-plex rental configurations. One demo is already completed and plans for the remainder are now being worked up by the city.

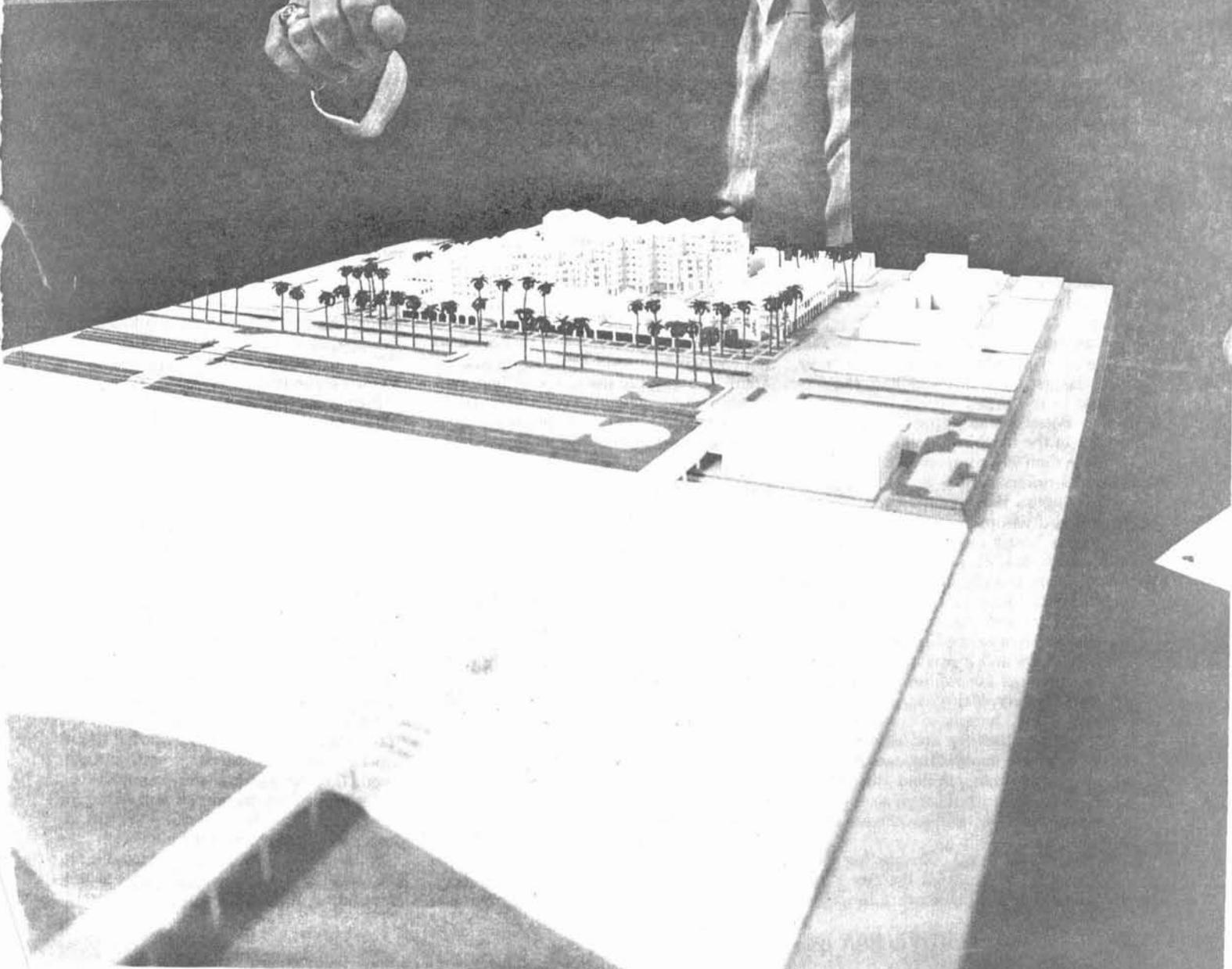
Main/Pier plan

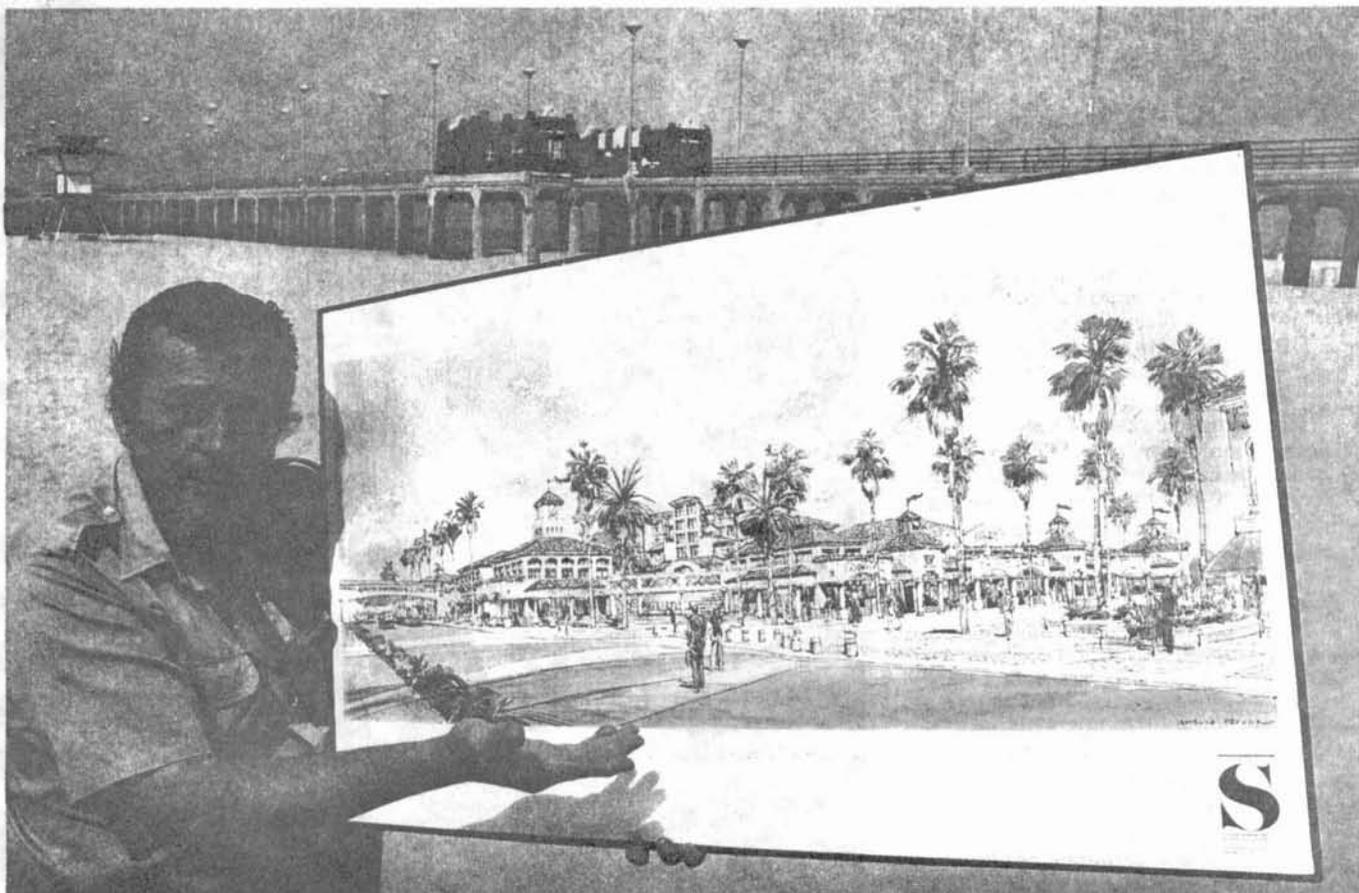
Just off the drawing boards, the Main/Pier Redevelopment Project is Huntington Beach's most ambitious development plan. The complex project, some 336 acres in size, will take shape once all the developers have been approved by the city.

Located in the older, somewhat shabby downtown core area near the beach, the project will be centered at Main Street and the pier, and will run north from Beach Boulevard to Golden West Street along and near Pacific Coast Highway (PCH). Plans call for a 300-room, top quality hotel and more than 11,000 square feet of commercial and retail space. Along the beach itself, an additional 75,000 square feet will be set aside for specialty retail shops offering food, dessert and beach rentals. Three blocks inland from the pier, another 50,000 to 60,000 square feet of retail and commercial space will rise as part of the Main/Pier plan.

Artist's projections of the pier itself, sur-

Douglas N. La Belle, deputy city administrator/redevelopment for Huntington Beach





Jack Kelly, city councilman in Huntington Beach, shows a drawing of the Main/Pier plan

rounded by lush gardens, depict a glamorous oceanside dreamscape. There will be additional boardwalk space, and at least two or three more restaurants will join the Maxwell's By The Sea complex of eateries that now stand at the pier's entrance. Major public use space is planned for the pier environs, as is subterranean parking.

Eventually, Main/Pier may encompass between 600,000 and 1 million square feet of commercial and mixed uses, says Deputy City Administrator/Redevelopment Douglas N. La Belle. "As for the pier itself, it will become the focal point for a major visitor-serving center, optimizing some of the best beaches in the world."

La Belle, however, is quick to express the "people" aspect of development. "All of Huntington Beach's development hasn't been and won't be commercial, because the city is responsible as well as ambitious," he says. "We're a community of 180,000 that seeks balance. Any redevelopment requires a balancing of land use. People have to be considered as well as buildings."

But Adams expresses another point of view: "The city needs more population to support new commercial enterprises," he says flatly.

The non-commercial projects in Huntington Beach include Talbert-Beach, a soon-to-be-completed, 25-acre residential package comprising 164 apartments and 96 condo units at modest costs for senior citizens. Fifty-four additional condo units (at market rates) are also planned here. Another 96 senior condo units which will not be subsidized by federal housing and

residential development awards are still on the drawing boards.

One and two-bedroom residences are also planned for Yorktown-Lake, a 30-acre project that will surround Huntington Beach's crisply modern City Hall.

"Even the predominantly commercial Main/Pier will contain new living facilities," Adams says. They will include 240 homes and condos and a 343-unit, 20-acre apartment cluster (studios to two bedrooms) called "The Breakers," which was completed last year.

Super street

Nonetheless, the development focus in Huntington Beach does remain predominantly commercial. Nine cities, including Huntington Beach, have joined to begin converting Beach Boulevard into a "super street," a street that can handle 70,000 to 100,000 vehicles per day. City fathers foresee extensive cosmetic beautification of the boulevard, curb and sidewalk alterations and general enhancement of commercial locations—all as a first step. "The probability for the future," Adams adds, "will be mid-rise office buildings" along the thoroughfare.

One phase of this proposal, however, was rejected by Huntington Beach, Buena Park and La Habra. Overpasses, approved as part of the plan by the Orange County Transportation Commission to eliminate jammed intersections, will have to wait. Considering Huntington Beach's often monumental traffic snarls, Kelly is disappointed. "Without the 'flyovers' whatever

we do will just be a Band-Aid on the problem."

Paralleling Beach Boulevard, the Gothard Street industrial corridor houses numerous warehousing, research-development and light manufacturing firms. Another major industrial area is located in the northwest part of town. Principal activities and products made in the area include space technology, oil field equipment, metal fabrication, medical supplies, precision instruments, computer ware and electronic components.

New businesses continue to emerge on Beach Boulevard each year, taking their place alongside the established senior entrepreneurs of the street, including the highly visible, inimitable and venerable Cal Worthington, TV's premier auto salesman.

What it all adds up to is certainly no "sleepy little beach town" but a growing energetic city expanding its considerable commercial and industrial base with alacrity.

That's a far cry from Huntington Beach in 1901. It was then called Pacific City. A syndicate formed by a P.A. Stanton purchased beachfront property with the intention of turning it into the Atlantic City of the West. Those best laid plans ended when Stanton and his associates sold out to Henry E. Huntington, who promptly renamed the town after himself and arranged for the Pacific Electric Co. to run a passenger line down to his beach.

By the 1920s, oil companies began leasing (and later purchasing) land from the Huntington Beach Co. For good reason:

One well alone, old Bolsa Chica No. 1, was good for 4 million cubic feet of gas and 1,742 barrels of crude each day.

The rest, as they say, is history. In several roughly concentric expansions, Huntington Beach incorporated additional land until it reached its present size.

Today, Huntington Beach is a city rapidly moving toward a fifth of a million people in size. According to 1980 census figures, just over 85 percent of its residents are white, about 8 percent Hispanic and less than 1 percent black. Asians and "others" make up the remainder. Conveniently, males and females divide the population between them equally.

Homes in Huntington Beach range in price, according to David Hayes, Coldwell Banker assistant branch sales manager, "from \$120,000 for a modest old, one-story, one-bedroom beach bungalow, to \$2 million-plus for a stately waterfront property with a boat dock on Huntington Harbor."

Homes facing the ocean from across PCH on the Huntington Strand fetch between \$300,000 and \$600,000. Year-round rentals, as distinguished from summer rentals, generally run from \$700 (two bedrooms, 900 square feet) to \$2,000 or more for a four- or five-bedroom, two-story home with 3,000 square feet.

Although Huntington Beach can scarcely be viewed as a corporate headquarters town, the roster of its major business tenants is indeed impressive. Among them: Unocal, McDonnell Douglas Astronautic Corp., Weiser-Falcon Lock Division of Masco Corp., Southern California Edison Co., J.C. Penney Co. Inc., General Telephone Co., Borg-Warner Industrial Products Inc., Rogers Cable TV, Phillips Petroleum Co., Montgomery Ward and Cambro Manufacturing Co.

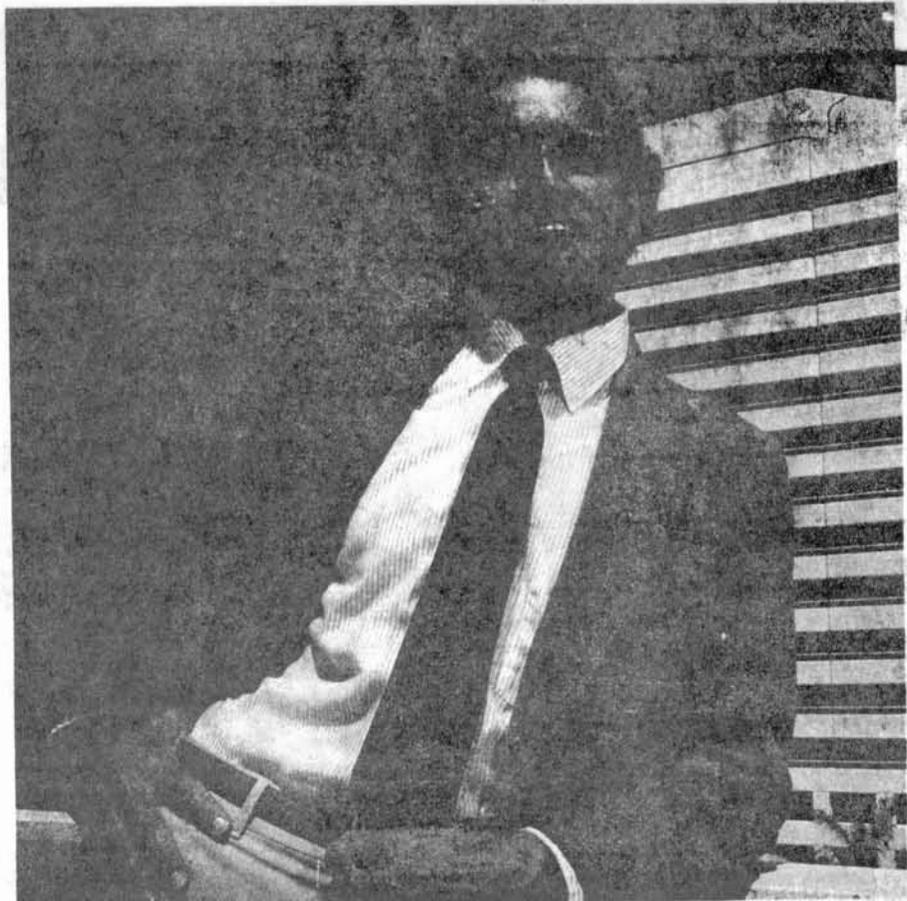
Huntington Beach, however, cannot ignore what may be its No. 1 problem:

"There's no getting around it," Councilman Kelly observes. "We have massive traffic circulation problems."

Bruce Gilmer, Huntington Beach traffic engineer, puts it another way: "There is a traffic problem inherent in being so near the beach, and it can cause a lot of discomfort. Driving down PCH at 2 mph on a hot summer day looking for a parking spot can turn anyone into an unsafe driver. That's what we're most concerned about."

Ten million visitors yearly, many of them exuberant and naturally experimental young people out for a good time, can also cause major headaches. Occasional drug and drunk busts, fistfights and rowdiness mar the pleasant atmosphere of the downtown/pier area. But Huntington Beach's 5 percent crime rate (49 per 1,000 people each year) is notably lower than the rest of Orange County, and far below that of many other densely populated areas in Southern California.

For decades the city clashed with Standard Oil over royalties, battling for its rightful share all the way to the governor's office in Sacramento. In 1963 Huntington Beach finally won its protracted fight and began receiving a small but increasing remunerative percentage that now yields



Mike Adams, city principal redevelopment planner for Huntington Beach

about \$4 million to municipal coffers each year.

Bolsa Chica wetlands

Once heated clashes between the city and "downtown" businessmen seem to be largely a matter for historical study these days, considering the Main/Pier project. But another war is far from over. Wildlife lovers and environmentalist groups such as the Amigos de Bolsa Chica, Sierra Club and the Audubon Society have fought for a decade to restore and preserve the natural environment of the Bolsa Chica wetlands. Their efforts have effectively tripled the original 300 acres planned by Orange County and the owners of the land.

"In a word, the ecology forces have stymied development in the Bolsa Chica land mass," Kelly says. "But it has been under scrutiny for five to seven years because of its tremendous economic potential."

Unincorporated county land that is nestled in an oceanside pocket surrounded by the city, the preserve teems with tens of thousands of shore birds and other wintering species. The Bolsa Chica wetlands is densely populated with halibut, corvina, croaker, mollusks and crustaceans that support the birdlife.

Amigos past president and present spokesperson Lorraine Faber vehemently opposes those eyeing the area, at least partially, as a possible development site. "It's no longer responsible to run roughshod over coastal natural resources now that their immense value has been proven scien-

tifically. The nursery of the ocean is its wetlands, and they must be protected."

Whatever the problems and conflicts, Huntington Beach, also the home of public television station KOCE and Golden West College, remains a remarkably friendly place with an ideal climate, essentially smog-free air and "the lowest crime rate of any large city west of the Mississippi," says a man who should know—Robert Mandic, mayor of Huntington Beach. "It's got to be one of the safest and most pleasant places to live and work."

There are those, of course, who mourn the passing of, among other things, the hallowed Golden Bear bar. There are more than a few who yearn even now for the Huntington Beach that once was. Addressing them, Kelly says, "Despite all the development, there really isn't any discernible difference down along the Pacific Coast Highway."

One beach boy-turned-entrepreneur, a man who wishes his salad days to remain forever anonymous, has his own way of saying goodbye to all that:

"You can still drive to the beach by way of Golden West Street," he says, staring at the waves lashing the pilings of the Huntington pier, "then proceed at a 1960s pace down PCH in a 'little deuce coupe'—mentally erasing those tankers and oil platforms on the horizon and ignoring what's happening inland to your left. If you try, really try, you can still get the feeling of what Huntington Beach was like before the boom."

Well, for the time being anyway. □