

LOCAL NEWS

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Not all to close with naval station

They are places steeped in 52 years of tradition, rites of passage and fond memories.

Places like Gull Park, where generations of families caught their last glimpse of departing loved ones and their first glimpse of returning heroes.

Places like the bandshell at Sailors Park, where entire ships' crews and their families celebrated a job well done.

Places like Club Mariner, where young sailors — away from home for the first time in their lives — made friends and whiled away their off-duty hours.

All of those places and more are part of Naval Station Long Beach, which will be formally closed Sept. 30.

Before that act, which will convert the station into a support facility for the adjacent Long Beach Naval Shipyard,



NEIGHBORHOODS

Bill Hillburg

the Navy is inviting the whole community on board for a final, nostalgic lap around the grounds.

"The Final Stretch," featuring a 10K run, a two-mile stroll, a mile dash for kids and a pancake breakfast, will be held beginning at 6 a.m. Sept. 10. Awards will be given to top finishers in 12 age categories, and all participants will get a T-shirt.

"Naval Station Long Beach is

an important part of Long Beach history, and we want the community to come out and share their memories," said Tim McMahan, the base's athletic director. The event is being staged by Navy Morale, Welfare and Recreation, with support from Long Beach-based FHP Health Care.

McMahan said that, as the shutdown date nears, a growing number of Navy veterans have been visiting the base. "They've all got memories," he said. "They bring their kids and grandkids to show where they served."

McMahan knows his Long Beach Navy lore. His father was stationed at the base during the Korean War, and he served there as an enlisted man in the 1970s.

Contrary to popular belief, Naval Station Long Beach won't



The naval station's recreation center will stay open, says Tim McMahan, athletic director. Press-Telegram photo / Juanito Holandez

become a ghost town after Sept. 30. The majority of the base's facilities, which would be the envy of many small cities, will continue to serve a large population of military personnel, retirees, their families and civilian employees.

The recreation complex includes three small parks, a 32-lane bowling center, swimming pools, fitness center, service members' clubs, a large lighted athletic field and a gymnasium.

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HILLBURG: Parts of naval station to stay open after Sept. 30

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The number of people eligible to use those facilities, along with the base's Commissary (a grocery store) and Exchange (a department store) and Naval Medical Clinic, exceeds 173,000.

Lt. Karl Johnson, the base's public affairs officer, said that total includes 50,860 active duty personnel (Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard) living within 30 miles of the base and 28,740 retirees (people with 20 years of service or more). The number of Navy personnel stationed at the base now stands at 2,470, down from 5,200 in February.

Other eligible base users include military dependents (including children up to age

18), Public Health Service personnel and other designated federal employees, including workers at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard and Terminal Island Prison.

"We serve the entire military community, including the retirees who earned these privileges through their service," said McMahan. "We plan to continue full operations after Sept. 30."

The long-range future of the base — and its recreation complex — is directly tied to the fate of the Long Beach Naval Shipyard. The yard, which narrowly escaped shutdown in the last round of base closings, is expected to be targeted again in 1995.

For the time being, facilities at the former Naval Station Long Beach will primarily be used to house and serve officers and enlisted people whose ships are being repaired in the yard.

The Navy's Sept. 10 party will likely give old salts and the public their last look at Gull Park, a picnic area at the end of the long mole that shelters the base's anchorage. The mole, which also includes a football and soccer field called Mole Park, will be closed Sept. 30.

The facility, expected to be declared surplus by the Navy, is being considered for use by the Port of Long Beach.

McMahan waxed nostalgic last week as he drove out to Gull Park, which will be the

starting and ending point for the Final Stretch. The park has been the site of hundreds of Navy going-away parties and homecoming gatherings, from World War II through the Gulf War.

"I remember when this anchorage was filled with ships," said McMahan as he pointed to the empty piers.

"There's a lot of pride in the Navy community we built here and a lot of history shared with Long Beach. It won't quickly be forgotten."

Bill Hillburg's Neighborhoods column appears on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Got a news tip? Call (310) 499-1287.

Entering the Stretch

- **What:** Long Beach Naval Station's Final Stretch
- **When:** 6 a.m., Sept. 10
- **To enter:** Call (310) 547-6390 or (310) 547-6854
- **Fees:** including a T-shirt and a pancake breakfast, \$13 for civilian adults, \$12 for kids age 12 and under, and \$12 for military personnel
- **Deadline:** Sept. 1, after which a late entry fee of \$5 will be charged.