

# Long Beach

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## 15 Minutes With . . . Incoming Chamber Chair Joanne Davis



Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce Chairman-elect Joanne Davis will be installed at the organization's 120th Annual Meeting June 16 at the Long Beach Convention Center. (Long Beach Business Journal photograph by Carlos Delgado)

**J**oanne Davis, president and founder of The Davis Group, is ready to accept the leadership role as the next chair of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. The organization's 120th Annual Meeting is set for June 16, at which time Davis will accept the leadership gavel from the current chair, Jim Eaton.

The Long Beach-based Davis Group specializes in strategic planning, public affairs, fundraising, marketing and political consulting. Started in 1999, it's a partnership between Joanne and her husband, Rick Davis. She knew from an early age what she wanted to be involved with, and today she brings to the chamber 25 years of experience working in politics and government.

Joanne Davis attended Long Beach schools and earned her bachelor's degree in political science from UCLA. She points to Gary Hunt, former executive vice president of The Irvine Company, as her mentor.

"I worked very closely with him and he really mentored me in the finance arena. I learned a lot from Gary and still consider him a friend today, and a mentor," she said. Today, Davis speaks at

seminars about campaign finance management and has authored several articles on fundraising strategies for trade and general interest publications.

Through her firm, she worked with the past five California gubernatorial nominees, including Arnold Schwarzenegger. She also worked on the 2008 campaign of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and most recently with Carly Fiorina for the U.S. Senate seat. Davis completed her term December 31 as the chief financial officer for the California Republican Party. "They're kind of in a reshaping mode right now, preparing for next year," she said.

Davis discussed her firm and her upcoming year as chair of the chamber with Business Journal Staff Writers Sean Belk and Tiffany Rider.

**LBBJ:** Tell us about your business.

**Davis:** My husband and I own Davis Group Consulting – public affairs work and political consulting. . . . [such as] running campaigns. My husband, right now, is very involved with water proj-



Long Beach Chamber Chairman-elect Joanne Davis is pictured with the organization's long time president and CEO, Randy Gordon, outside the chamber office on the plaza level of the World Trade Center. Davis credits the chamber's success to the leadership and guidance provided over the years by Gordon and his staff. (Long Beach Business Journal photograph by Carlos Delgado)

ects in the state and doing a lot of public information and public outreach on both salt and sea in the Sacramento Delta area. I've been doing a lot more political work, financial management of large campaigns.

**LBBJ:** What inspired you to get involved in politics and government?

**Davis:** When I was in sixth grade I wanted to go work on Capitol Hill. I don't know why, I don't know who or what teacher inspired me to do that, but that was my goal. Between my junior and senior years in college I interned in Washington, D.C., working for then-Long Beach Congressman Dan Lungren. [Lungren is now a Northern California congressman.] Upon graduation he hired me and I went back to D.C. Then I returned to California and worked in his Long Beach office. I left his congressional staff and joined his political staff, working with constituent groups and fundraising for him and his elections.

During this time, the sitting state treasurer died and then-Governor [George] Deukmejian nominated Dan to fill the seat. He was confirmed by the assembly but not the senate, losing by one vote. So then I did some other things, working for some other folks, and joined the California Republican Party staff. I was the deputy director there in 1990 when Pete Wilson was running for governor.

**LBBJ:** Is there a particular local project that you've worked on through the Davis Group that you would like to highlight?

**Davis:** We haven't done too much in Long Beach. My work has been more in the statewide campaigns that are heavily financed. It is kind of money management. We are working with John Watkins for Long Beach's 4th Council District. But really, we haven't done too much Long Beach-specific work.

**LBBJ:** What is the difference between running a finance campaign for a state candidate versus a local candidate?

**Davis:** Unlike business, when you run a statewide campaign... you're basically looking at a year or less. You have to raise and spend tens of millions of dollars, and you have less than a year to do it. You have to hire staff, open offices and go through all the HR. You have to run the strategy, hire consultants, win the race and then you have to take the whole thing down all within a year. It's a huge undertaking.

Because of campaign finance laws, the compliance is very strict when you have contribution limits, especially when you are running different types of campaigns. A senate race is federally qualified money, versus a state race, which is state qualified money. In state races you can take corporate money; federal races you can't. It's all individual dollars, it's all limited. The state party can take lots of different types of money, but it gets segregated into different pots. So you have your federal pot, and then you have your candidate-specific pot, and you have your non-candidate pot. So you're figuring out what kind of money can go where, you have to make sure you're in compliance with the law, and then what you can spend it on. If you're doing something specifically for Carly Fiorina, it has to be 100 percent federal money. If you're doing something specifically that's Meg Whitman only, it has to be 100 percent state candidate qualified money. That's been what I've specialized in over the years.

**LBBJ:** How long have you been involved with the Long Beach Chamber?

**Davis:** I have been involved for about six years.

**LBBJ:** What do you hope to achieve during your term as the chairman of the board?

**Davis:** We just had our board of directors retreat, and there are three things that I asked the board to focus on and that we discussed in breakout sessions, along with a lot of other great ideas.

Number one, I want to work to see if we can work to develop a strategic plan for economic development for the city. Jerry Miller, who has our Red Team and is the chair-elect, brought to my attention that the city doesn't have a strategic plan for economic development, which is actually quite frightening. So we are going to pool a lot of resources and see if we can come up with something. Jerry is amazing, and he has had a lot of experience in this arena working with a lot of the resources here; the universities, a lot of the companies, a lot of the small businesses. We want to see if we can put something together to actually present to the mayor and city council as a strategic plan for economic development. That's probably going to be a multi-year process.

Number two is, as part of our commitment to work with our education system and helping build a good workforce, I want members of the board to "adopt" a student from each one of the high schools, Cal State Long Beach and Long Beach City College [for a year]. Have this be your person, and if they're from the business school at Cal State Long Beach or, say, student body president at one of the high schools, bring them to the chamber. Take care of this person when you buy a table at the State of the County, or you buy a table at the annual gala. Bring them in, show them how the chamber works, what's the purpose of the chamber, show them how business works in this city and bring them to a board meeting to see what we do. Let them know what business does and how we can better help education.

I've had brief conversations with [Long Beach City College President/ Superintendent] Eloy Oakley and Michael Solt at Cal State Long Beach, who is dean of the business school. Randy's talked to Judy Seal at Long Beach Unified and the board was very receptive to it at the retreat, so I look forward to putting that program together.

The third thing is really in infancy stages – it's just something we're exploring. With the redistricting efforts going on now and the state's Citizen's Redistricting Commission, can we look at the City of Long Beach and surrounding communities and can we create districts that will be perhaps more business-friendly than they are right now? This isn't a Republican or Democrat thing. We need to look at our districts, at our legislators, make sure those districts overlap, that they make sense and that they are in geographical and city boundaries.

One of our congressional districts, Dana Rohrabacher's district, is in Orange County and then it comes [into Long Beach] through Ocean Boulevard south through downtown and then up through Palos Verdes Peninsula. Does that really make sense in representing the city? Then the other district is a lot of Long Beach, and it's over into the Compton area and so forth. Does that really make sense? As this redistricting process goes forward, are legislators going to be pitted against each other? For example, Rod Wright, who we've had a great relationship with, can we protect him? Is he going to be settled into a district where we can continue to work with him, or is he going to lose a district? So we've talked to the California Chamber about this and we're moving forward to see if that's something that this chamber can even get involved in. That takes a lot of resources in terms of data and information and statistics, so we have to utilize the California Chamber's resources to do that and they're very involved in the process on a statewide

level anyway. So that's in it's real infancy, but obviously, with my political background, it's something that's really intriguing to me.

**LBBJ:** What are some specific things that can be done to strengthen the relationship between the chamber and Long Beach small businesses?

**Davis:** You know, the chamber has so many resources for small business hiring practices, human resources laws, tax workshops – all kinds of things. I think we need to better communicate that to our small businesses and really let them know what resources the chamber has to help them. For example, the port is having on June 8 a seminar and afternoon conference on how to contract with the port. That's something that our small business folks should be all over, and we need to communicate that to them, get them out there, teach them how to do it, teach them how to become qualified for federal contracts and for state contracts, and really walk them through that process so they have the opportunity to participate. So I really want to strengthen our communication with small businesses and what resources we have and how we can help them. It's all about jobs, jobs, jobs.

**LBBJ:** How do you plan to approach the issue of attracting and retaining business?

**Davis:** That's something that Jerry Miller and the Red Team are looking at, attracting businesses to Long Beach and how to retain them. That's a real challenge. The Red Team was created . . . I'm not sure how long it's been here, but Jerry's really taken it to a new level in the past year working with folks from the public and private sectors. It's really talking about who's out there looking to come to Long Beach, how do we get them here, how do we work with entities to bring them in and get them through the process. So the Red Team is a big focus for the chamber.

**LBBJ:** The Chamber's Political Action Committee (PAC) is one of your clients. Will that relationship continue during your tenure as chairman of the board?

**Davis:** No, not on a paid level. My group, my husband and I, we contribute to the PAC and we speak at their candidate schools in the summer. We usually give presentations, and I'm hoping that the PAC can get more involved in helping to elect business-friendly candidates in the city.

**LBBJ:** How is your relationship with local elected officials?

**Davis:** This past year, [Current Chair] Jim Eaton has done a great job of meeting with each one of the councilmembers. . . . and developed a relationship. There has been some tension in the past with some offices, and I think that's softened a great deal. So I hope to continue with that, meet with them one-on-one and certainly, if there are issues that we disagree on, we'll have a good debate about it and a friendly disagreement, but certainly let them know the chamber's position and business' position if we believe it is opposed to their position. But we look to do that on a friendly, work-together basis.

**LBBJ:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Davis:** The chamber is great people. The board of directors is an amazing group of people. The staff is amazing, dedicated and works hard. [Chamber President/CEO] Randy Gordon does so much for this community, not only with the chamber but with the charity work that he does, being an auctioneer at all of these charity auctions, and he's really out there in the community doing an excellent job. It's all a team effort, with Randy and the staff and the board and everybody. ■