

## Sea Fest To Help 'Long Beach Kids Meet Long Beach Businesses'

Youth Summer Program Continues Recruiting Local Enterprises

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A unique effort among public, private and nonprofit entities is bringing today's young people into the world of business

The Sea Festival Association of Long Beach, in partnership with the City of Long Beach Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine and the Long Beach Business Journal, is putting to work an initiative to develop a greater outreach to inner city kids by having businesses host group tours May through September.

Greg Williams, president of the nonprofit Sea Festival Association, said he wanted to develop an emphasis on establishing a relationship with the businesses of the city and its young people. Williams noted that, in his work as vice president of Coldwell Banker Commercial Blair Westmac, each day he gets to see a different kind of business and learn about that particular industry. "We just wanted to get kids excited about different things. I don't think the average kid gets a lot of exposure to the different, exciting kinds of businesses that are there," he said.

According to Williams, this initiative stems from when he and Chris Pook, executive director of the Sea Festival Association, were campaign finance managers for Becky Blair of Blair Commercial Real Estate when she ran for Long Beach City Council several years ago. The duo came up with a similar idea called Leading Kids that Blair could promote during her campaign.

The summer program, provided through the parks and recreation department, is designed for youth, ages 10 to 15, who live in the north, west and central areas of the city to have the opportunity to learn about the variety of Long Beach businesses as well as the various industries they could potentially work in as adults. The program is part educational and part recreational, and includes a three-quarter day visit to a local business to experience its operations first hand.

"The objective is to get the kids thinking about their future," Pook said. "If you just stop and think about the number of unique businesses in town, this could be a very unique program to Long Beach and can have huge benefits."

The Charter Communications Sea Festival is charged with reaching into the inner communities of the city, Pook explained. This summer program, along with the department's other programs, is "critically important to the fabric of this community," he said.

As Pook and Williams work with companies setting the time and topic of each tour, the parks and recreation department posts them for kids to sign up. "It has to be something that's going to captivate a child, too," Williams said. "We want to find businesses where they can see something being done and say, 'Wow. How did that happen?'"

Each participating business provides a daytime tour of its facilities, with an explanation of its industry and productivity for an estimated 80 to 100 youngsters. The company sponsoring the visit provides transportation to and from the site, lunch and a tour. Counselors from the parks and recreation department attend with the kids as chaperones during the tours. "After each tour there will be a takeaway for each kid to keep their mind focused on what they did," Pook said.

The program is starting with two businesses at the moment. "We want to walk before we run," Pook said. "It's our hope that after three years, every week we will have a business participating."

The businesses Pook and Williams are currently working with are water-related, which ties in nicely with the Sea Festival. One of those companies is AES Southland, LLC, located at 690 N. Studebaker Rd. AES and its steam-generated power plant play a huge role in the circulation of water in Alamitos Bay, and Pook said their unique approach to power generation is enticing to children.

"They're going to host a couple of groups of kids to come and understand how electricity is made and, more importantly, the relationship of making that electricity with the ocean," Pook said. Matson Navigation has also come on board, which should, subject to security issues, be able to show kids how various commodities get here from their place of origin, according to Pook.

"If we can expose kids to the different kinds of businesses that exist, rather than having their choices be becoming a fireman or a policeman or working for the city, it's something that gets very little exposure to them," Williams said. Pook agreed. "There has to be a cache of interest here to stimulate because the attention span with kids is pretty short," he said. "You have to have something that's going to get their attention."

"We're happy to participate in this program with the association and the city," said Business Journal Publisher George Economides. "The world of business is changing rapidly as are the skill sets needed to succeed in a career. Exposing young people to more career options is essential in ensuring well trained employees are available to fill employer needs."

Some ideas Williams suggested for the program include a trip to Boeing to see the construction or deconstruction of an aircraft, a trip to the Queen Mary to see hotel and event operations first hand or a trip to a Carnival Cruise Line ship to see how the crew turns the ship around between guests leaving and guests arriving.

If anyone is interested in having his or her company involved in this program, contact the Sea Festival Association at 562/426-7670 or visit [www.longbeachseafestival.com](http://www.longbeachseafestival.com). ■