

Oceanside Women Lead Business and Economic Development

For decades, Oceanside women have been making names for themselves as strong business and civic leaders.

October is National Women's Small Business Month, which honors the accomplishments of female entrepreneurs. Oceanside offers many exciting opportunities for women to achieve their personal and economic goals.

Combining law with civic leadership

A local businesswoman who has won numerous honors for her accomplishments is attorney [Colleen O'Harra](#). Her legal practice specializes in trust administration and estate planning. Colleen's impressive resume includes serving two terms on the Oceanside City Council from 1992 to 2000. A past president of the Oceanside Chamber of Commerce and a former City Planning Commissioner, she also has served on the governing boards of numerous organizations.



Colleen O'Harra

O'Harra [received the 2012 City of Oceanside Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award](#) and was recently inducted into the San Diego County Women's Hall of Fame. She said the community has been highly supportive of women in business. Colleen noticed 15 years ago that women moved into prominent leadership positions in practically every service club and major nonprofit organization in the city.

Because of their roles, women were in positions to play major roles in the City's economic development, she said. "That was a watershed."

"It has been so much fun watching Oceanside grow over the years, particularly watching the downtown area come alive," she said. "Oceanside has it all. We've got great weather, the Harbor, the beach, the Pier, the Oceanside Museum of Art, and Tri-City Medical Center."

The City also offers a great work-life balance, she said.

“I came to Oceanside because I married my college sweetheart who was born and raised in Oceanside,” she recalled. “We were both school teachers when we graduated from college.”

After becoming an attorney, Colleen decided to open her own law practice in 1980.

“I’ve never hesitated being in business in Oceanside,” she said. “It’s my home. It’s my community. I’ve been successful here. I’ve raised two daughters who still live in Oceanside and between them, they have eight children.”

Oceanside is proud to have such a dedicated business woman who is so involved personally and professionally.

Expanding a family business

[Robin Siok-Gray](#), President and CEO of LAMVIN, Inc. has built a successful business in Oceanside by manufacturing custom architectural acoustical products that reduce sound and echoes.



Robin Siok-Gray, President & CEO

The business opened in 1961. It was purchased by Siok-Gray’s parents in 1988, and she was involved from the beginning. Robin bought the company from her parents in 2008, and under her leadership, LAMVIN has become a national leader in the creation of quality architectural acoustical products.

“Our products are aesthetically pleasing,” she said. “We’re known for our custom capabilities.”

The business, which has a 51,000-square-foot office and warehouse, ships products throughout the U.S. and around the world, she said. There are 28 full-time employees.



LAMVIN's office in Oceanside

LAMVIN was recognized by the Ceilings & Interior Systems Construction Association in 2018 for its design of acoustical panels for the Hoover Institution's Traitel Building as well as Stanford Home of Champions Sports Hall in Stanford, California.



LAMVIN's project at the Stanford Home of Champions Sports Hall

Among recent projects are the Mauna Kea Hotel in Hawaii, the Rancho Cucamonga Courthouse, Nike Corporate offices in Oregon, and Google offices in California. In the community, LAMVIN has created panels for San Marcos High School, First Christian Church, and the 333 Pacific Restaurant.

Siok-Gray enjoys her work and has never felt that being a woman makes it more difficult to succeed in Oceanside.

“I don't see being a woman as any hurdle at all,” she said.

The Women's Construction Coalition and Women in Architecture groups actively support women in North San Diego County, she noted. Robin stressed that her employees enjoy living in the Oceanside area.

“It's a beautiful city to work, live, dine, and play in,” she said. “It has everything you need.”

Growing her company

Another businesswoman who has made her mark in Oceanside is [Debra Allen](#), general manager of Eternal Hills Memorial Park Mortuary & Crematory. An Oceanside resident since 2002, Allen has more than 35 years of experience in her profession. Her passion is helping families in their time of need.



Debra Allen

As general manager of Eternal Hills for the past 17 years, she has been charged with growing revenue. She oversees a staff of 65 and is licensed as a funeral director, embalmer, crematory manager, and cemetery broker. The connected Women of Influence group named her its [2019 San Diego Lifetime Legacy Award recipient](#).

Under her guidance, Eternal Hills has increased its size by 17 acres. Her civic activities include serving on the governing board of the Joe and Mary Mottino Family YMCA. She also serves on the board of the Oceanside Chamber of Commerce, where she is the incoming chamber chair for 2020. She is a member of the Oceanside Charitable Foundation.

Allen encourages women in business to pursue their dreams. The Chamber of Commerce can help women in business identify mentors who can provide them with guidance.. She noted that Oceanside is home to The Women's Resource Center, an organization dedicated to providing supportive services, counseling, shelter, and education to women in North San Diego County.

"Women are coming to the table with professionalism, with passion, with education," she said. "I have seen Oceanside grow immensely, the restaurant business, the hotels, industry."

Allen noted that she has two grown children and six grandchildren.

“I’ve just been blessed to have moved here,” she said, “I’ve been fortunate enough to give back to the community and build some super relationships with great people.”

Oceanside has scads of successful women. In addition to being high achievers in business, many women serve in civic roles, helping to grow Oceanside’s economy and serve the community. Four of nine city departments are headed by women. Among women civic leaders are:

- [Esther Sanchez](#), an Oceanside City Council member who was first elected in 2000.
- [Leslee Gaul](#), the president and CEO of Visit Oceanside.
- Michelle Skaggs Lawrence, former Oceanside City Manager. She retired in October 2019 after 30 years of service.
- New Oceanside City Manager [Deanna Lorson](#), who joined the City in 2016 as Assistant City Manager leading the City’s economic development program.

“The City is proud to have so many women businesses and civic leaders with diverse backgrounds and talents,” said Deanna Lorson, City Manager at the City of Oceanside. “They are interwoven into the fabric of our community and have brought positive change in our neighborhoods and local economy.”