

EXTREME MAKEOVER FOR 'STREET ENDS'

The Laguna Beach council approves initial plans for a beautification near the beach.

By **KELLY GARRISON**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

LAGUNA BEACH • New benches, greenery, artwork, paving and security features are in the planning stages for about 30 beach "street ends" in Laguna Beach.

City staff members have been asked to work with community members and organizations to gather ideas for each end, where city streets meet the beach. While the project may take decades to complete, its organizers say public input will remain a priority.

"Our hope is to make the beach ends as special as they used to be," said Ora Sterling, president of the Laguna Beach Beautification Council.

After hearing details Tues-



Source: SWA Group

day about the project to enhance the street ends, the City Council approved initial plans to renovate three ends at Brooks, Cress and Mountain streets.

"The objective is to enhance the open space resources that the City of Laguna Beach owns and manages," according to the project concept document.

The city's capital improvement fund will help pay for research design and permitting costs, yet to be determined.

Director of Public Works Steve May said Cleo Street

was one of the only street ends ever renovated in the city. In October 2000, property owners paid \$45,000 of the \$60,000 project.

Throughout its history, the Beautification Council has completed many projects to improve the appearance of Laguna Beach facilities, such as working to remove graffiti and keeping debris and trash levels down, Sterling said.



Source: SWA Group

The Register

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UNDERWATER DISCOVERY

Ring Back To Rightful Owner After Being Lost At Sea

By Kelly Garrison
Features Editor

Something small and shiny below the surface of the seawater caught Phillip Pack's attention as he returned inland from snorkeling.

It wasn't buried treasure — yet.

The gold ring had managed to keep from sinking into the sand

after slipping from retired Col. Ernest Evans, Jr.'s finger while he was snorkeling in Oahu, Hawaii. Pack found the object two days later in the Hanauma Bay, the same area where Evans had lost it.

"I saw something glitter out of the corner of my eye," said Pack, who traveled to the area last month from his home in

Ohio to visit relatives. "I picked up a handful of sand and ended up seeing a class ring."

Pack showed the object to his family. It bore engravings that read "1954" and "United States Naval Academy" and boasted a red garnet in its center. The colonel's name was inscribed on the inside of the ring.

"The first thing I thought was,

'how long has this thing been lost?'" Pack said.

Back home, the 75-year-old Evans said he had already begun placing an order for a new \$1,800 class ring from his part-time residence on the Peninsula, when he got a phone call from a former classmate. Someone had found his ring.

"I couldn't believe it," Evans said. "I think it was God's will. That ring means quite a bit to me. It's 54 years of history."

That history includes Evans's experiences as a Vietnam War and 30-year United States Marine Corps veteran. He graduat-

ed in 1954 from the Naval Academy, which trains men and women to become naval and marine officers.

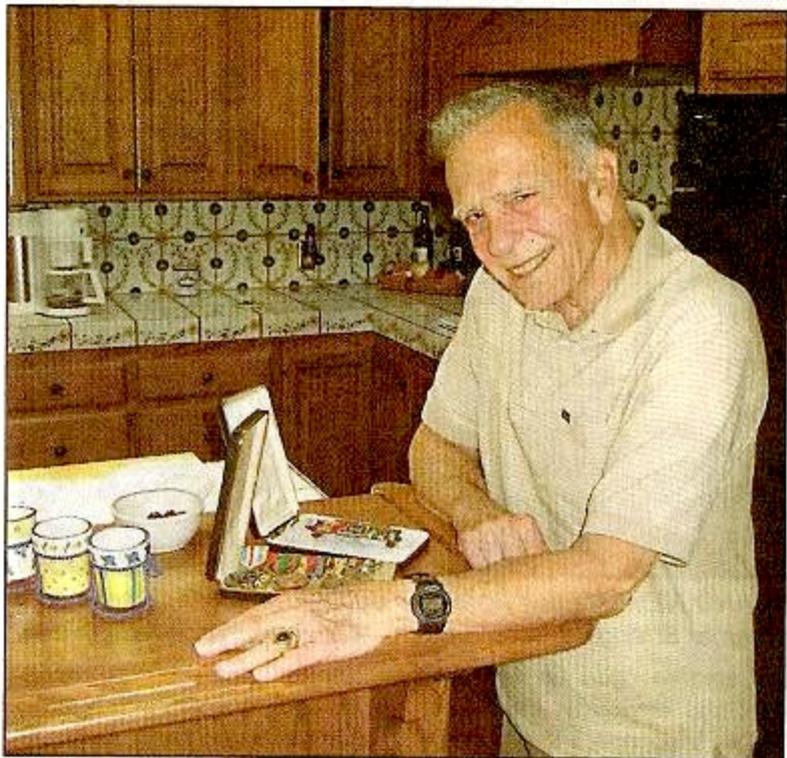
Pack had contacted him after a series of Internet searches that first led him to information about Evans' father — United States Navy Commander and Naval Academy Medal of Honor recipient Ernest Evans, Sr. Pack then contacted the academy and found out about the school's Class of 1954 Web site.

"I posted a note on the site," Pack said. "After that, some of his classmates called and I was

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IT'S POSSIBLE. Retired Col. Ernest Evans got his class ring back after a stranger found it in the sand. —Photo by Kelly Garrison

Ring

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able to mail the ring overnight (delivery)."

"The class of 1954 is still very active and very much in touch with one another by e-

mail," said Evans's long-time friend and classmate, Joan Madia. "It was truly a matter of minutes before one of Col. Evans's closest friends contacted him... They quickly struck up a friendship born of mutual respect and love of country."

To thank Pack for his kindness, Evans sent him and his family a copy of the book "Sea of Thunder," by Evan Thomas, which he said documents his father's leadership during the 1944 Battle of Samar during World War II. Pack, who also has family members who have

served in the armed forces, mailed Evans in return with a "thank you" letter and a family photo.

"I thanked him for his time of service and told him I would pray for him," he said. "I said, 'My kids have the life that they have, because you've helped

protect our country.' I didn't think twice about what I would get out of it."

Evans said having his ring back means more to him than just the money he would have used for a replacement.

"It proves that there are honest people in the world," he said.

Pilot Remembers Overseas Mission

By Kelly Garrison

Features Editor

Sixty-three years ago, on the day after Christmas, Belmont Shore resident Jim Meckoll watched the Golden Gate Bridge disappear behind him with the California coastline as he flew out of San Francisco Bay.

"I was kind of mournful looking at it, wondering if I would come back," he said.

Seventy-five combat missions and a war later, the pilot did return; and this week, he'll have his 85th birthday to show for it. Meckoll said he joined the Unit-

ed States Air Force in 1942 because he wanted to do what he enjoyed most: fly. His service as a pilot follows a lineage of family members who chose the same profession.

When people ask him why he decided to be a pilot, he chuckles rhetorically.

"Ever go 425 miles per hour down the street?"

During World War II in 1944, the armed services called him to duty — a task he knew could ultimately involve risking his life. But he knew that when he first enlisted, he said.

"I didn't have any doubts," he

said. "...Unless we've left a better world, we haven't done our job."

During his service, he learned to fly P-38 fighter aircraft, a double engine plane made for dive-bombing and other operations. Later, he served in the 80th Fighter Squadron during World War II.

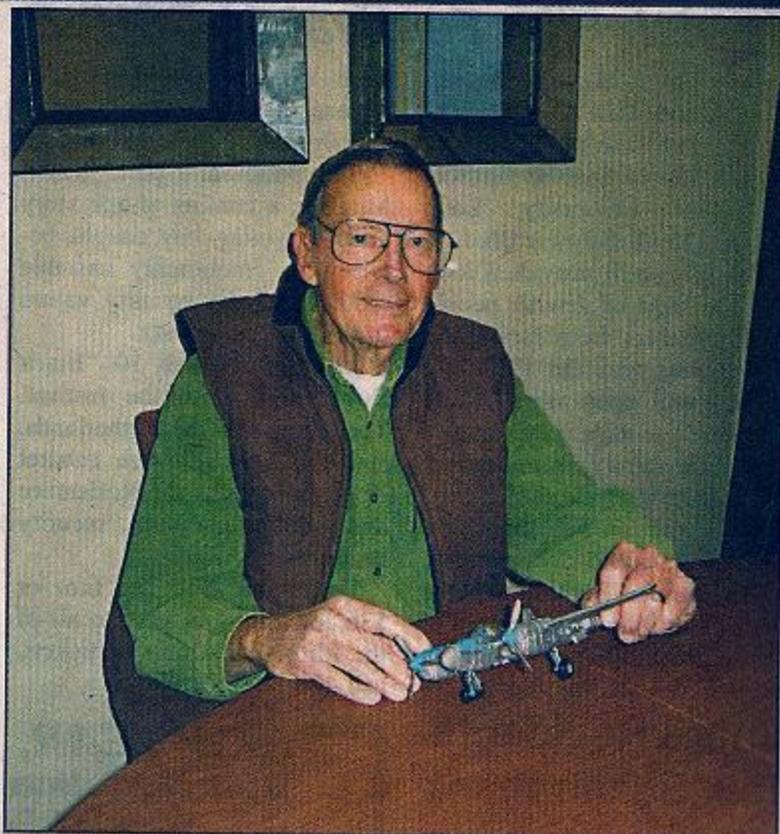
"We mostly flew in the Philippines," he explained.

Toward the end of the war, an officer notified his group of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The information would instantly change the course of their mission.

"They had grounded us, and we didn't know why," he said.

"When our operations officer told us that they had dropped atom bombs, we threw him out

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WAR STORY. Jim Meckoll, who flew P-38 planes during World War II, holds a model fighter aircraft. — Photo by Kelly Garrison

Meckoll

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of our tent — then we realized he was serious."

His mission ultimately involved helping escort Japanese on Aug. 19, 1945, to the Philippines to sign a peace treaty. During the operation, he and members of his squadron flew with officials to Ie Island.

"The U.S. told Japan to sign a peace treaty with the Philippines, so we were flying high cover to notify them if anything funny happened," he said.

Years later, the now retired Meckoll alternates between residences in Belmont Shore and Big Bear with his wife. His two brothers also came back from the war, while his son began showing interest in the family's

signature piloting profession — particularly in the same type of "twin-engine, twin-tail" planes that his father flew.

"He was awarded as the number one-qualified pilot in his graduating class," he said.

Meckoll also had worked as an engineer for what is now the Boeing Corporation before joining the service. It was the same place he met his wife, Phyllis Meckoll, who he's been married to for 48 years.

Sitting near him in their living room, she helped him finger through pages of his 80th Fighter Squadron newsletters, sprawled over a world map and his model fighter plane.

"It's something that they were born with," she said of Meckoll and his brothers. "They love to fly."