

Bob Burnside

A legendary Los Angeles County lifeguard was laid to rest last weekend. Bob Burnside, who died in 2019 at the age of 87, was memorialized outside the Zuma Beach Lifeguard Headquarters where he spent decades serving the people of Malibu and our many visitors.

Burnside, who was born in Los Angeles on May 20, 1932, died on Dec. 11, 2019, and on Sunday, Oct. 17, scores of his friends, family and colleagues gathered to celebrate his life and the lasting impact he had on the world's lifeguarding community.

Lifeguards presented a flag in a ceremony to Burnside's widow, Annette, and a poem written by Burnside, "A Castle in the Sand," was recited. Surfers, guards—active and retired—and family members gathered on the sand to remember Burnside before rowing, paddling and swimming out onto the water to spread his ashes. A bagpiper performed as mourners reflected on Burnside's legacy, before attending a memorial luncheon at nearby Malibu West Swim Club, where Annette spoke.

Longtime Point Dume residents may remember Burnside as an original co-founder of the beloved Point Dume Santa Claus Parade, which he started with friend Jack Campbell in the 1960s.

Perhaps Burnside's most notable contribution, at least outside the point, is his invention: Burnside was credited with inventing the orange flotation buoy now used the world over for ocean rescues, which he developed in 1970. The buoy features three handles and a tow rope and, according to retired LA County Fire Captain Spike Beck, who spoke at the recent memorial service for the legendary lifeguard, "the Burnside buoy is still the most recognized piece of rescue equipment worldwide." Readers may recognize it hanging up at any guard tower in LA County or, for those not as inclined to hit the beach, from the hit TV series "Baywatch."

In his long and storied career, Burnside began as a lifeguard (first hired at age 19 in 1951) and went on to become the inaugural president of the United States Lifesaving Association. He eventually was named chief lifeguard of LA County.

He also founded a lifeguarding organization in Mexico, called Club Tortuga, detailed at the memorial service.

According to an article published in *Swimming World Magazine*, Burnside “was instrumental as a member of the affirmative action committee to mandate women's rights to take the beach lifeguard test that led to the hiring of the first female ocean lifeguards by the department.”

The magazine called Burnside “perhaps the best known and most iconic lifeguard in the United States.”

“Bob was a legend. I miss him, I admire him, and I wish you all well,” Beck said.