

Tom Viren

On October 19, 2022, Tom Viren passed away peacefully at home with his family. Tom was 79-years old.

Growing up in El Segundo, Tom was a High School and Colligate championship swimmer. Tom Viren worked as a pool lifeguard at the El Segundo Plunge and then for one year as an ocean lifeguard for the City of Huntington Beach. In 1962, Tom took the Los Angeles County exam and finished first in the training academy. His first assignment as a seasonal lifeguard was in the Northern Section where he worked for four years. In 1966, Tom was promoted to permanent lifeguard, and he continued to work at Zuma beach. Within a few years, Tom passed the Coast Guard Boat Operator's exam and began to work on the Baywatch Rescue Boat. In 1970 and 1971, he worked on the boats at both Avalon and the Isthmus on Catalina Island, and he became a member of the L. A. County Underwater Search and Rescue Team.

It was during this period that Tom was elected as President of the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Association. At that time LACOLA was not an employee representative organization and the lifeguards were not represented in labor issues. Rather, they had an agreement with the Board of Supervisors to receive the same benefits as Deputy Sheriff's.

As he was learning the ins and out of politics and the importance of community support, two major events took place. In 1974 and 1975 Santa Monica and then Los Angeles City Lifeguards were merged with L.A. County. At the same time, Tom was promoted to the position of Lieutenant and was assigned to Dockweiler Beach.

In 1976, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors ended the Sheriff's parity agreement with the L. A. County Ocean Lifeguards. At that time Tom began a successful campaign to have the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Association (LACOLA) certified as the official bargaining unit for Ocean Lifeguards. Tom then accepted the position as the Director of Employee Relations, a position he remained in until the mid 1980's.

When Don Rohrer was appointed Chief Lifeguard in 1990, he promoted Tom to Section Chief and reassigned him to an administrative position at Lifeguard Division in Venice. In that position he was assigned to oversee the budget, supplies, facilities, communications, and information systems.

Tom worked in the background from 1992 to 1994 to convince Supervisor Don Knabe to have the Board of Supervisors move the lifeguards from the Department of Beaches and Harbors to the Los Angeles County Fire Department. It seemed to Tom, as well as others, that this was the logical home for the lifeguards and their public safety mission. The goal was achieved in June 1994.

Nearing his retirement, Tom asked then Chief Lifeguard Randy DeGregori for an opportunity to transfer to a field Section Chief position. In 1998 Tom Viren returned to the Northern Section where he had started his career in 1962. Tom retired in 2001.

In 2007 Tom Viren was awarded the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Lifetime Achievement award.