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Executive Director Julia Chambers at the Channel Islands Maritime Museum, a harborfront assemblage of centuries-old seascapes and finely detailed ship models.

MAKING WAVES

How Julia Chambers plans to turn the Channel Islands Harbor into a cultural beacon for Ventura County.

BY KATERI WOZNY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MONTANO

Julia Chambers has always believed in going the distance to spark people's minds. She is a motivator who speaks with passion and integrity, and who can draw anyone into her light. On a typical day, the executive director of the Channel Islands Maritime Museum (CIMM) can be found at the Oxnard facility working on fundraising, social media, or new programs. She's been there since August 2013.

"I love coming up with new programs that people can enjoy and find interesting," she said. "I want to get people away from their digital lives and into their real lives where they can taste, touch, and smell the air, and at the same time

become intellectually stimulated."

Julia finds CIMM an inspiring challenge and loves telling the story of navigation.

"The lines of longitude and latitude encompass the globe," Julia said. "If we didn't have the commerce, trade, and ships that came into the port today, there wouldn't be an Oxnard. That is our legacy here, and we celebrate that at the maritime museum."

Philanthropy has always been part of Julia's life. She grew up in Rochester, New York, where her father served on the boards of many nonprofits and instilled in her the importance



ABOVE: A handsome, large-scale model of the USS Constitution, loaned to the Museum by Dr. Maurice Friedman.

RIGHT: Interactive exhibits include authentic, historical equipment such as this Engine Order Telegraph. In the background, a binnacle (built-in housing for a ship's compass) and other steering/ onboard communication equipment.

OPPOSITE: Renowned shipbuilder Edward Marple spent more than 500 hours carving the figurehead on this model of the HMS Royal George, the largest warship in the world at the time of its launching in 1756.



of community. She resides in Moorpark with her husband, Eddy, a pediatrician, and their children Lucas, 14, Kyle, 12, and Theo, 9.

"It's a tradition in our family to give back to others," she said.

With an extensive education and working background in museum and public art studies, Julia has always had an appreciation for the beauty of art. "Art is not only a good historical account, it is also reflects the beauty of the different ages," she said. "Art captures the emotion, and I love how it raises people's spirits. I got into the museum business because of art and how it can expand people's minds."

Prior to CIMM, Julia was the executive director of Gull Wings

Children's Museum (GWCM), an Oxnard-based nonprofit she effectively rebranded by improving its appearance, programs, exhibits, and learning opportunities. She currently serves as GWCM's board president and is hoping to move the museum into the former social security building in downtown Oxnard by next year.

"It would be a wonderful opportunity, and the City of Oxnard has been initially supportive of continuing the legacy of [GWCM] downtown," Julia said. "Gull Wings has been around for 28 years, and I like serving on the board to help strengthen it."

Some people have questioned whether there's a conflict of interest in Julia serving on the GWCM board

while working as the executive director at CIMM. But as she explained, "The funding, missions, and audiences don't overlap ... Oxnard needs a strong arts community, and I am open to helping both thrive."

Never tiring of public service, Julia also serves as an official Oxnard Ambassador, sits on the board of the Oxnard Convention and Visitors Bureau, and is part of the steering committee for Ventura County Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. "I like making connections with interesting people who think outside the box," she said.

The former site of Port Royal restaurant in Channel Islands Harbor has been home to the \$2.5 million renovated CIMM building for four years. It was previously located in the Fisherman's Wharf. "When you work for a nonprofit, you have a mission and a goal to engage the community by providing something worthwhile to them," Julia said. "At the museum, it's worthy because what we offer is culture that is at the heart of why we are here in a first place."

According to Julia, the two-level museum has five centuries of maritime art from European collections, rare bone models of ships made by French prisoners during the Napoleon wars, interactive exhibits, La Jenelle shipwreck artifacts, rotating exhibits featuring local and international artists, education programs for elementary, middle, and high school students, and stunning views of the harbor. There's also a monthly speaker series, as well as a quarterly newsletter that features a special message from Julia and updates on news and events.

"Our education programs provide many children in the Ventura County area with their first visit to the ocean," Julia said. "Besides showing them the museum history, paintings and ship models, we partnered with a marine science educational lab in the harbor and the students have the opportunity to feel the waves beneath their feet for the first time. It's a thrill for them."

But it's CIMM's exquisite ship models and five centuries of paintings that distinguish the museum. "There are over 260 maritime museums in the United States, and the ship models and paintings [here] are among the finest collections on display in the country," Julia said.

In February 2016, the museum will celebrate its 25th anniversary. Living history will be featured over President's Day weekend as the tall ships Lady Washington and Hawaiian Chieftain visit the port, and a Silver Anniversary gala will be held on February 27 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Ventura.

Each year, the museum raises some \$286,000. A small portion of that comes from admissions, while the majority comes from grants and donations. One of the largest contributors is Martha V. and the Martha K. Smith Foundation for the "Every Fifth-Grader on the Water" program. According to Julia, the foundation has donated about \$50,000 to the program over the past two years.

"We look forward to establishing an endowment for the maritime museum in 2016, in addition to surpassing our budget goals so we can do an even better job of attracting visitors and creating fantastic exhibits that everyone will love," Julia said.

Until then, she works hard to leave a legacy of inspiration to others.

"I want more people to realize what is possible with something that I helped create," she said. "Whether it's wanting to explore the world or choosing a career because of something they saw, that's what matters the most." ■

For more information about the Channel Islands Maritime Museum, log on to channelislandsmaritimemuseum.org or call 805.984.6260.

