

Don Darnauer
Memorial Service
Sept. 18, 1931 – June 8, 2026

For those who may not know me, I'm Deb Kahookele, and like so many people here today, I was fortunate enough to call Don Darnauer my good friend.

When I found out that Don wanted me to speak at his memorial, I was deeply honored. It is a privilege to help celebrate and remember a friend who gave so much to his country, his community, and the people around him.

Long before I met Don, he had already dedicated himself to serving Long Beach, even running for City Council because he believed in getting involved and making a difference. He believed that positive change happens when good people step up, and he lived that belief every day.

In 2025, I was honored to nominate Don for the Long Beach Veterans Banner Program for his service in the US Coast Guard. Out of more than 165 nominations and only 65 veterans selected, Don was one of those chosen. It was a fitting recognition for a man who spent his life serving others.

With a distinguished 30-year career in the United States Coast Guard, retiring as a Chief Warrant Officer 4, Don dedicated much of his life to serving both his country and his community.

Throughout his military career, he earned numerous badges, medals, ribbons, and commendations, including recognition for recruiting excellence, marksmanship, exemplary conduct, and service during the Korean and Vietnam eras.

Most people knew him as "Downtown Don," and that nickname wasn't something he gave himself—it was something he earned.

He was a proud resident of Long Beach for 47 years.

Don loved Downtown Long Beach.

He didn't just live here; he helped shape it.

Whether it was serving on commissions, boards, committees, community organizations, attending meetings, supporting local businesses, or simply showing up whenever something needed to be done, Don was always there.

You could often spot him wearing one of his favorite T-shirts:

"I Love Downtown Long Beach" or "Downtown Is My Playground."

Those shirts weren't just something he wore—they reflected exactly who he was.

Downtown wasn't just where Don lived. It was his passion, his purpose, and his extended family.

His impact on Downtown was so significant that when Kathy Kelton reached out to me wanting to find a meaningful way to recognize Don's years of service,

I was honored to help and work with the Downtown Long Beach Alliance to create what became the "Downtown Don Anchor Award"—

an award that will continue recognizing people who share Don's commitment to making Downtown Long Beach a better place.

And it was only fitting that Don became the very first recipient.

But while many people knew Don for his leadership and service, those of us who knew him personally also knew his sense of humor, his patience, and his ability to find joy in just about any situation.

One of my favorite memories was when a group of us (Lora, Matt, Lisa, Peter, Cindi & Myself) took Don and Barbie on a Duffy boat ride through Alamos Bay to see the Christmas lights.

What was supposed to be a beautiful holiday duffy ride quickly turned into an adventure.

It was a cold night, and then the Duffy boat decided it only wanted to drive backwards... and at the slowest speed imaginable.

Lora insisted this wasn't a problem and started driving it backwards with Peter's help.

I was like "really"...but we did.

We called for help, but eventually decided we could slowly make our way back to the dock ourselves.

I think we saw a few Christmas lights along the way.

Don and Barbie had to be freezing...because I know I was.

I know he had to be thinking we are never making it back.

But we did, and Don just kept smiling and saying, "This was fun!" Because that's who Don was...always grateful.

We also shared many dinners together at his favorite restaurant, Applebee's, where Don always had his signature margarita—or two.

So, if you are ever at Applebee's have their classic margarita and a toast to Downtown Don.

What I will remember most, though, is not the awards, the titles, or the accomplishments.

I'll remember a man who loved his community.

A man who showed up.

A man who treated people with kindness and respect.

A man who made people laugh.

A man who genuinely cared.

And a husband who deeply loved his wife, his rock, Barbie. They truly were Downtown Long Beach's perfect couple.

Don leaves behind an incredible legacy, not only in the projects he helped create or the organizations he served,

but in the relationships he built and the lives he touched.

Downtown Long Beach will always be better because Don was here.

Those of us fortunate enough to know Don are better because he was part of our lives.

Cindi and I will miss listening to Don's stories. And if you knew Don, you know he loved telling them. Every conversation seemed to come with another story, another memory, or another piece of Downtown history. They never got old.

Thank you, Don, for your friendship, your service, your humor, and your unwavering love for this community.

People called him "Downtown Don,"

but what made that title special...wasn't just that he loved Downtown.

It was that Downtown loved him back.

You will be deeply missed, forever remembered, and always appreciated.

Deb & Cindi