

# SanDieGO

## History on display at Naval center

By CARLA WHITE  
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**W**hat could possibly be happening at a former Naval Training Center that ceased functioning more than a decade ago? How about everything!

Today, Liberty Station, a 360-acre area directly across a water channel from San Diego International Airport, is becoming one of San Diego's most vital destinations for history and architecture buffs, art and culture aficionados, tourists, outdoors people and foodies.

A drive through Liberty Station makes one want to walk instead. From beautiful parks and busy restaurants to a funky little golf course, this unusual redevelopment project has something for everyone.

Who would've thought it 74 years ago?

### Boot camp beginnings

In 1923, the West Coast's first military training center, the Point Loma Naval Training Station, commenced operation. Over the decades, this boot camp — which later became known as the Naval Training Center — was home to about 1.75 million Navy recruits who received primary, advanced and specialized training there.

On April 30, 1997, the base was closed. Three years later, the Navy turned the property over to the city of San Diego. In an interesting example of a public-private initiative involving the city, community activists and developers, a comprehensive plan was devised to create a self-contained community — a model of urban design — that would include educational facilities, restaurants, retail outlets, parks and other recreational areas. The new name for this oasis: Liberty Station.



Command Center, Building 200, is Liberty Station's visitors center.

Now this ambitious project is operated in a partnership between the city Redevelopment Agency and the Corky McMillin Companies development group.

According to Kim Elliott, senior vice president for the Corky McMillin Companies, "This project was Corky McMillin's passion. He wanted to preserve the history of the place. It is, in some way, his legacy project."

She said McMillin, a developer who had lived in San Diego County for most of his life until he died in 2005, had huge respect for the military that was so much part of his community.

Now at his Liberty Station, final projects are underway, although most of the area's historic restoration has been completed. And happily for visitors, new shops and restaurants continue to move in to this very happening community.

### Award-winning project

The Liberty Station project is founded on a rather remarkable infrastructure that the Navy left behind. Many of the original buildings on the compound were designed by Lincoln Rogers, who designed buildings in the Renaissance Revival style. Also apparent is the Spanish Mission style — not surprising since Rogers was inspired by

and abandoned military bases.

Tree-lined streets, sculpted gardens and swaying palm trees create a small-town feeling at Liberty Station. Indeed, it is a small town, anchored by the new homes in its residential district

Of greatest interest to visitors, though, are the other districts that comprise

Liberty Station. There are 125 acres of public parks, including the 46-acre NTC Park, already home to walking paths and open areas where families, artisans and cultural groups meet.

When completed, Liberty Station will feature one of the largest waterfront parks in San Diego, incorporating two ball fields, two large picnic areas, four half-court basketball courts, a sports plaza, two playgrounds, a multipurpose field and an esplanade for bicy-

cling and walking.

Retro-cute and open to the public is the nine-hole Sail Ho Golf Course, one of the oldest courses in San Diego County, originally constructed to help enhance the physical fitness of Navy recruits. Famed professional golfer Sam Snead was the head golf pro there while he was in the Navy, and Craig Stadler and Phil Mickelson have played junior golf tournaments at the Sail Ho.

The arts and cultural district, with 26 buildings, is home to the NTC Promenade ([www.ntcpromenade.org](http://www.ntcpromenade.org)), a nonprofit umbrella for the dance companies at Dance Place San Diego, theater companies and such museums and galleries as the New Americans Museum and the Visions Art Quilt Gallery. Monthly original watercolor shows are put on here by the San Diego Watercolor Society.

Open seven days a week, NTC Promenade provides a plethora of programs, such as the Malashock Dance program that offers live performances and workshops throughout the year. Links to all of the programs are found under the Arts & Culture

section at [www.libtystation.com](http://www.libtystation.com).

The retail and commercial district, also called The Marketplace, offers grocery and hardware stores and some specialty shops. Wine Steals has become a popular place to purchase boutique wines as well as a place to enjoy oenology classes and wine-tasting events.

Also there are some great restaurants, and their numbers are growing. The upscale Solare Ristorante - Lounge features Northern Italian cuisine and impeccable architectural details.

Oggi's Pizza & Brewing Co. is the place to come for pasta or a "hydraulic sandwich" — the term used by Navy recruits for a liquid lunch.

And then there is the hotel district. On the waterfront is the Homewood Suites by Hilton — the first hotel to come to Liberty Station. The 200-room hotel is within walking distance of most of Liberty Station's restaurants, as is the nearby Courtyard by Marriott, where visitors can enjoy views of San Diego Bay and the downtown skyline.

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