

Maggie Young

Making Fleet Week a Reality

By Judith A. Habert

Photo By Dawn Nicolli/Nicolli Productions



Maggie Young was born at the Naval Hospital in Newport, Rhode Island, perhaps an early predictor of a future geared towards military life. “My dad was in the military, so we moved quite a bit. We first came to San Diego when I was in the first grade. We remained here through 11th grade, and the summer before my senior year of high school, we relocated to South Carolina. After some time in Charleston, South Carolina, we moved to Hawaii.” After her family’s stint there, Maggie decided to remain in Hawaii and did so for another five years. Maggie felt it was too expensive to remain on the Island, so she made her way back to San Diego. Maggie graduated from San Diego State with a degree in English and an additional certification in accounting.

As with most young college graduates, Maggie worked in restaurants for years. Soon after, she met her first husband and gave birth to three beautiful children. She divorced several years later and left the restaurant industry for a position with DRS Technologies, a government contracting company, where she worked in accounting and contracting.

“When I left DRS, I went to work for Booz Allen Hamilton, which also supports the military. A big part of my job included supporting the modernization of military ships. After leaving this position, I moved to my current job as Vice President and COO of San Diego Fleet Week.”

With a heart for the military, it was not surprising that Maggie would move on to a job focused on honoring our military. Maggie has been volunteering in the community for over 20 years. She is currently a Life Member of the Holiday Bowl Red Coat Committee “I also volunteered for Fleet Week from its early beginnings but wasn’t until 2013 that I became an employee.”

I asked Maggie to tell us a little about Fleet Week; as San Diego Residents, we are familiar with it, but not necessarily its origins. “Fleet Week San Diego was started by a group of community and business leaders to recognize and honor the contributions of active-duty military in the region. Fleet Weeks all over the country but we are not all the same. In other regions, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, San Diego is home to the largest military concentration in the country, and Fleet Week is here to bring the community and the military together. It was back in 1997 that the local Chamber of Commerce started holding Fleet Week, but it soon grew, and in 2001, it became a private 501 C 3.”

So, what happens during Fleet Week? “We have multiple events in November to honor our active duty. We have an enlisted recognition luncheon. We have a military concert with both the Navy Band and Marine Corps bands. Our main events are held down on Broadway Pier, north of the Midway. We have a Navy ship, Coast Guard ships, and Marine equipment. We have a big Innovation Zone where we bring together the technology commands of the military, the local tech companies in San Diego, and many small tech businesses. This gives the public a chance to get hands-on experience seeing what the military does and what the companies that support San Diego and the military do as well. We also have a two-day long Student STEM event in the innovation zone, where

we have about 4,000 students who come down to the pier on field trips. These field trips include elementary to high school-age students. We pay for buses to bring these students to the festivities, and we include many students from underserved neighborhoods in the county. So, in our nonprofit capacity, we raise funds to pay for the events and the busing to get as many San Diego students as possible to attend the events and learn more about the amazing work that our military does. We have about 12 events during a 10-day period, which runs from November 1st through Veteran’s Day, November 11th. I am extremely grateful to our board and a committee full of a lot of great volunteers, as we only have a handful of employees responsible for Fleet Week.

I was curious how many volunteers it took to actually pull off such an amazing event. “Our main group of volunteers includes our board and committee, which comprises about 30 individuals. But we are also lucky to have many public and military volunteers, which brings our volunteer toll up to at least 150.”

Maggie’s job involves the extensive planning that goes into each of these events. She is also tasked with raising the money to ensure that these events can go on and be visited by school children in San Diego.

With all that it entails, Maggie and her crew have a short Christmas break, and they are right back at planning for next year’s Fleet Week. Knowing how much work is involved to ensure all the moving parts come together, it is obvious that Maggie is a very structured and detail-oriented individual who realizes the importance of providing the amazing events that comprise Fleet Week.

I asked Maggie what her favorite part of Fleet Week was. “We have a golf tournament in September prior to Fleet Week.

This tournament is held at Sycuan and is just for the military. It is definitely my favorite part of Fleet Week. The guys and girls get to just relax and play together; I know it is one of their favorite events as well. Next to that event, my favorite is the Enlisted Recognition Luncheon. At this event, we specifically honor active-duty enlisted military. We bring out about 300 active-duty military, and they get seated with the community. The community sponsors the table. These are enlisted folks who distinguished themselves with their community service and within their commands. It is held at the San Diego Zoo. So, there are animal interactions, lunch, and giveaways. Then, we honor a specific person with a presentation of the *Making a Difference Award*. And that person has been nominated by their senior leadership for their volunteer service in their community and their extraordinary contributions to the community.”

Approximately 400 military personnel attend Fleet Week and remain on the pier during this time since they may have several different events going on at any one time. Another not-to-be-missed event is STEM Day (which has grown to a two-day event). Many of our military members participate in these events since, on average, about 4,000 students attend this popular event.

We have a military Family Day specifically for active-duty personnel and their families to come down to the pier. We give them lunch, goody bags, and snacks. This is an important event for our active military, as we invite military nonprofits to this event so they can inform our military of the services that are available to them.

Having been a part of Fleet Week for so many years I wanted to find out from Maggie about some of the changes that have taken place over the years. “Over the years, I’ve seen it evolve and become much more important to both our military and the community. Since 911, there have been increases in security, which means less access to the civilian population. This event brings them together again, allowing the public to see the important work our military is doing as well as the

Photo By Dawn Nicolini/Nicolini Productions



many sacrifices they make every day to protect our country. When the public sees the skills they possess, they feel safer, and they are impressed by the knowledge they have, especially when you consider that a lot of our military are 20-year-olds who have technical knowledge that people three times their age may not possess.

San Diego is primarily Navy-based, but during Fleet Week, all branches of the service are invited to participate, including the Marines, Coast Guard, Army, and Air Force. It is truly an event that brings people together to celebrate our great service men and women.

Fleet Week is an incredible event that every San Diegan should take part in. Remember when you are cozy at home with your family, it is thanks to the men and women of the military that you have that luxury. So, let’s all go out, learn more, and celebrate the proud men and women who look after us while we care for our families.

Maggie mentioned that donations are always helpful, and she is currently seeking out more volunteers as well as tech companies to join as sponsors. I personally cannot think of a better way to show your support and gratitude for all they do. Mark your calendar to attend this outstanding San Diego event.



Photos Courtesy of Maggie Young