

OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

Why He Wrote the Book on How OC Grew



By Charles D. Martin
Mont Pelerin Capital

In the early years after World War II, Orange County was viewed as a “bedroom community” for workers that commuted to L.A. Having arrived here in 1960, I have seen it all ... the transformation of “The OC” into a dynamic regional community with its own identity.

I was compelled to write this book before much of this history was lost. It is now two years later and the book—“**Orange County Inc.: Emergence of an Economic Powerhouse**”—is nearing publication.

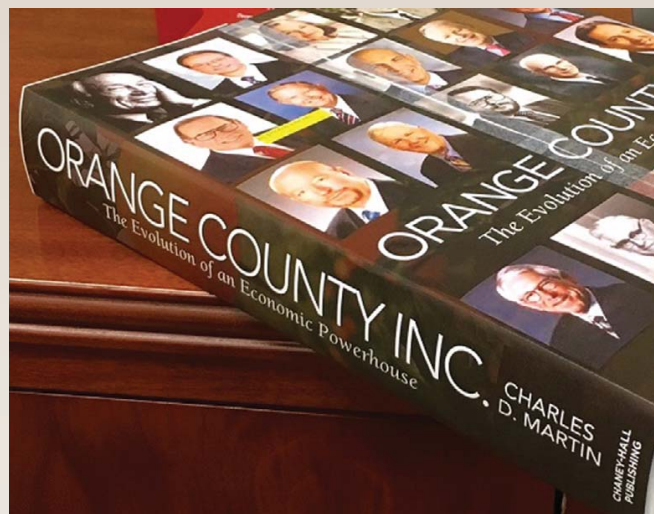
It has been a huge amount of work and a fascinating journey for me and my staff writer/researcher. The story of Orange County is, perhaps, like none other across the nation. The county has grown from a population of just over 100,000 at the end of WWII to 3.2 million today. Along with it came a remarkable process of entrepreneurship and company building that would create a dynamic business community. Unlike Silicon Valley, Orange County has emerged as a diversified economy with strong growth across more than a dozen industry sectors. It has become the second-largest economy in California (behind L.A.) and is larger in economic output than most states and nations.

Many individuals have played a key role in the development and success of the county. I have featured their stories and the impact of their efforts in the book. We all know their names: **Arnold Beckman, Gavin Herbert, Henry Samuelli, Donald Bren, Walter Knott, George Argyros, Walter Gerkin, Joan Irvine Smith** ... and the list goes on.

Many notable leaders have also stepped up in the nonprofit sector, particularly in the development of the county’s higher education institutions, including Chapman President **Jim Doti** and a stream of chancellors at UC Irvine beginning with **Daniel Aldrich** and followed by the legendary **Jack Peltason**.

The county has benefited enormously by the high impact of these leaders, and their stories are celebrated in this book. It is impressive how those who achieved success here have invested back in the county’s advancement through their philanthropy in education, culture and healthcare infrastructure. OC’s leaders have been generous with their resources and also their wisdom.

The book presents the stories of 200 companies in 16 different industries, including introductory material on why those industries thrived here. The Orange County business community was not built on the back of big national companies that located divisions in the region. Most all of these companies were founded here, many with innovations that changed their industry and have touched lives globally. These are stories about people ... courageous, visionary people that created highly successful businesses.



It has been delightful to interview many of these people and learn their stories. Very few made the journey without traveling to the edge of oblivion, where they had to put everything on the line and persevere over insurmountable obstacles. Readers will be surprised and enlightened by many of the accounts in this book.

The book also looks back at the early days of Orange County and traces its land history from the Spanish and Mexican land grants through the ownership and development we know today. We have taken a “deep dive” into the question of why it happened here. At least one factor is that this county is populated by industrious people that migrated here. They came from all over the nation and many from foreign countries. I accounted for 25 national origins of entrepreneurs who started and built very successful companies in the county. They were/are an individualistic, independent thinking set that are a lot like one of our famous citizens, **John Wayne**.

Many people have misconceptions about aspects of the county’s history and how companies developed. I saw a big need to get it down in print for the record before much of the history is lost forever.

Orange County is still young and just getting going.

We have good things to expect in its future.

“**Orange County Inc.**” is a large-format, full-color coffee table book with 416 pages. It is scheduled for publication June 1. Visit OCBizBook.com or email info@ocbizbook.com for more information.

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