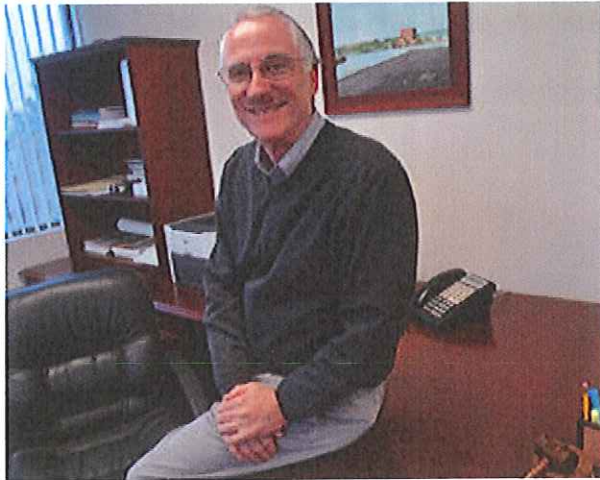


Former ILWU president James Spinosa to retire

By Art Marroquin Staff Writer

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ILWU board member James Spinosa will retire Jan. 1 after 41 years with the union, including several terms as president of Local 63. (Robert Casillas/Staff Photographer)

After serving as the face of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union amid a sea of changes at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, longtime labor leader James Spinosa will retire from the union Thursday.

His tenure was marked with securing unionized jobs as modern technology entered the shipping industry, along with shepherding rank-and-file members during a contentious labor dispute earlier this decade.

"I'm proud to have had the opportunity to serve this great union and its workforce, which is second to none," said Spinosa, 69, of San Pedro. "I'm very humbled and pleased and I feel that I'm leaving this place a little better than I found it."

Known around the docks as "Spinner," he began working in 1969 as a terminal warehouseman for Local 13, then

became a marine clerk in Local 63 a year later. Spinosa served several terms as president of Local 63, including 1988-89, 1991, 1996-97 and 2008-09.

Spinosa was also elected in 1997 to a three-year term as the ILWU's international vice president, then moved into the role of president from 2000 to 2006.

His career with the ILWU began in 1984, when the presidents of Locals 13, 63 and 94 asked him to develop a plan aimed at determining the role of longshore workers during the change to containerization - the practice of shipping cargo by packing it into long containers.

The strategy was considered a success and Spinosa was tapped to oversee similar changes at ports along the West Coast.

"We really didn't have a handle on how we could capture that work because our workforce wasn't set up at that time to deal with those changes," Spinosa said. "So I went to work for the union and set up a program that everybody appreciated."

His term as Local 63's president during the late 1980s was highlighted by a trip to European ports, where union executives and terminal operators observed new computers and cargo-handling equipment that were bound for the United States.

"We were in a whole new era of mechanization and technologies and the ILWU needed to retool itself and identify where the industry was headed," Spinosa said. "That was when I started a plan to educate the rank-and-file about these new skills that were needed for their jobs."

Just after he was elected to lead the ILWU at the international level in 2000, Spinosa organized a dockworkers conference that was attended by representatives from 25

countries. The 2001 symposium was held in Long Beach in anticipation of contentious labor negotiations the following year with the Pacific Maritime Association.

Contract talks began in May 2002, with tensions escalating over several months and finally culminating in the PMA's decision to lock out unionized workers. The move led to a complete shut down of the West Coast's ports for 10 days and dealt a \$58 billion blow to the national economy.

President George W. Bush finally intervened by reopening the ports with a Taft-Hartley injunction.

Bush's homeland security chief, Tom Ridge, called Spinoso during the acrimonious labor dispute and encouraged him to continue negotiating "day and night" to come up with a labor pact with the PMA, said Robert Maynez, who served on the ILWU's labor relations committee at the time.

"The federal and state government forces were putting pressure on the union to bargain more expeditiously while Ridge kept citing economic and domestic security as a major concern in all this," said Maynez, who is now director of administration for Local 63.

"They were sending a message that the government was trying to implement various levels of security right after 9-11, so we were scared, but Jim just stayed calm," Maynez said. "Jim kept us united and he managed to achieve a great contract for the union."

In a show of gratitude for his leadership for reaching a six-year settlement after the labor dispute, Spinoso won a second three-year term as the ILWU's international president in 2003, receiving 97 percent of the vote from rank-and-file members.

Spinoso returned to Local 63 in 2008 to serve two more years as president, with his term set to end today.

Peter Peyton, a longtime union board member, will begin his first term as president of Local 63 on Friday.

"My main goal is to create jobs, not only for the longshore division, but to increase this industry to become competitive with the Panama Canal," said Peyton, a San Pedro resident.

"It's an honor to be coming in after Spinner," Peyton said. "He was a great leader for our union."

art.marroquin@dailybreeze.com