

The



The *Alive!* Interview

'It's a City Family'

Thanks for talking to us! The last time we did this, in 2008, you had to take off because of a fire in your district.

TOM LABONGE: Right, that happened the last time. I hope not today.

The last time we interviewed you, Tom, we got a lot of information from you. So we want to jump ahead right now and go right to the fact that you are departing from your current position, and we want to ask you about your legacy. What do you feel you want your legacy to be when people think about you 10 years from now?

TOM: Well, the important thing is the relationships I've had with the people of Los Angeles and the people who work for Los Angeles. It's tremendous. I could go from talking about Shelly Lyons, who worked at the Bureau of

*On Friday, March 6, Club CEO John Hawkins and *Alive!* editor John Burnes interviewed Mr. LA, Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member, for the last time before he is termed out in July, at which point he will most likely not be employed by the City for the first time since the 1970s. The interview took place in his Council office in City Hall.*



From left: Club CEO John Hawkins interviews Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member."

Mr. LA

THE ALIVE! FEATURE

LaBonge Legacy



After being a visible and proud City employee for nearly 40 years, Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member, terms out and says goodbye.

How long would Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member, have remained in his current love affair with the City of Los Angeles had he not been termed out? LaBonge, the free-wheeling, no-texting, pure instinct-over-calculation whirlwind of a Councilman — perhaps the last of his kind — leaves his City employment July 1 after nearly 40 years of service because he has been termed out of office.

A City employee since the 1970s, LaBonge has always been a great friend to other City employees. Whether he sees other City employees in City Hall, or trimming trees, or trying to restore power, or helping people after a fire, his is as familiar a face to City employees as perhaps none other.

As he says in the interview, after he leaves, he's looking to continue his civil service through other opportunities outside the City (at press

time). But this is where his heart is, undoubtedly. Born and raised here, there is nowhere else he will go, or maybe even can go. For Tom LaBonge, there's no place like home.

To pay tribute to his extraordinary service, *Alive!* presents, along with his interview, a retrospective of photos from our own pages, and a few from other sources, too.

We look back for nostalgia, but as he bids goodbye, we also say thanks for everything, Tom, and we wish you the best of luck in your next endeavor. ■

Photos by Lloyd Awern, Shades of LA Collection, Los Angeles Public Library; Chris Gulker, Herald-Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library; Gary Leonard, Gary Leonard Collection, Los Angeles Public Library; Hollywood Christmas Parade; Tom Hawkins, Club photographer; Angel Gomez, Club Director of Sales; Summy Lam, Club Director of Marketing; and Club staff

Sanitation, and since retired, as he was so friendly. He happened to be the guy on my route, and on the back of the truck years ago. There was Randy Simmons, the late LAPD SWAT officer. I saw him a week or two before he was killed in that shootout in the West Valley that morning, and I'd say, "Hey, Randy." I knew him from the Centurions — I used to coach the LAPD football team.

I've experienced a lot of things with people whom I've known: firefighters, operators, engineers, everybody. I want to say this: I couldn't do it alone. I couldn't have done it without my family, with my wife Brigid and my children, my brothers, and the family I came from. That's number one. Number two are the people who gave me opportunities, starting back with Mayor Tom Bradley and his Youth Council; and Olivia Mitchell, the great administrator who still works for the City in the Community Development Department; Peggy Stevenson, the great Councilwoman from the 13th District; the legendary John Ferraro, City Council President. I worked for John. He used to say, if you help the City, you're helping the district; if you help the district, you're helping the City. That's such a vision that John had; Mayor Richard Riordan gave me opportunity, and he thanked me a month or two ago, which was very nice. He said,

"You were very good to me, Tom. You were my alter ego." I worked at Water and Power, a great City department — it serves the people, which was so different than being on the political side. Then the opportunity came when, tragically, John Ferraro passed away early, from a bout with terrible cancer. I asked my wife, Brigid, whether I should take that opportunity. But all of it, I couldn't do it without the people who work for the City.

And I come from a big LA family, and I really credit my parents, both of whom were born here — my mother in Lincoln Heights, my dad on Pine Avenue in Long Beach, but he grew up at 22nd and Union Street. My mom went to Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Lincoln Heights. My dad went to St. Agnes at Vermont and Adams. Also, my dad went to Loyola, which is now Loyola Marymount, and my mom went to Mount St. Mary's.

If you could stand up and look at all 35- to 40,000 City employees, and you had one sentence, what would you say?

TOM: So many people have been so good to me. Now, my trouble is I'm not a tech guy. I don't text or email, although I read them. I'm moving all the time. My success was that I went to where everybody worked. There's absolutely not a yard in

FROM ALIVE!, AUGUST 2008

LaBonge Says Thanks

Councilman Tom LaBonge, Mr. L.A., hosts a barbecue to say thanks to City employees.

From left: John Hawkins, Club CEO; Tom LaBonge, Councilman, District 4; Alan Willis, Transportation, 21 years of City service; Jeanne Min, Finance; and Zaki Mustafa, Chief of Field Operations, Transportation.

Photos by Robert Larios, Club Director of Operations

On July 17, Councilman Tom LaBonge held his annual appreciation barbecue to say thanks to hundreds of City employees, from a number of departments, including Rec and Parks, ITA, LAPD, LAFD, Public Works/Sanitation, and others. The barbecue took place in the Auditorium in Griffith Park.

From left: Frank Alvarez, Transportation, 33 years of City service; Tom LaBonge, Councilman, District 4; Todd Gaydowski, City Clerk's Records Management Officer; and Ilene Shapiro, City Clerk's office, 30 years of City service.

FROM THE PAGES OF **Alive!**

FROM ALIVE!, JANUARY 2015

Parade 'Rains' Supreme Council

Hollywood Christmas Parade a success despite downpour. Tom LaBonge honored.

While it may have been much needed, a downpour Nov. 30 threatened to put the damper on the 83rd annual Hollywood Christmas Parade sponsored by the City Council and Councilmen Mitch O'Farrell and Mr. LA, Tom LaBonge, Club Member. But the spirit of Christmas came shining through as the parade went on as scheduled.

Before the event, Councilman LaBonge, who strong efforts revived the parade during the economic downturn, was honored for his leadership. This edition was LaBonge's last as a sitting Council Member as he will be termed out this summer.

If you missed the parade in person or did not see it on TV, organizers say it will be archived on the website for streamed viewing.

THE ALIVE! FEATURE

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW
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my district or my area that I haven't been in multiple times, not a firehouse that I haven't been in or a police station or a park facility. I've always been out. People don't come here to see me. I go there to see them. I used to be able to get many things done without paper — I just got it done. People knew it was a legitimate relationship. But all of that is changing with technology.

What can you say about the quality of City Employees in the City?

TOM: Well, the dedication that public employees have in Los Angeles is outstanding, and that goes back my whole career. I especially remember the '94 earthquake in Northridge and the immediate response. Power was knocked out, and within three days it was back. Water lines were broken. They were reconnected. Traffic was challenged; it was rerouted. All the public works

aspects of the City that were so important were rebuilt; that's the key. That tells you about the team that we have.

Or how about the North Hollywood shootout, and the LAPD operators? Incredible work.

Do you see yourself as a unique public leader?

TOM: So many times people are critical of the City, and criticism is good for correction. But still, you've got to move forward and make people believe. Downtown is not my district. But you know what the title of my name is, truly? Los Angeles City Council. So that means every part of Los Angeles, including and specifically your own district. This dramatic downtown transformation has really been big, and I'm glad I've been part of that. When I first got elected, everybody was going to Palmdale or Temecula, and now they said they want cities. They want real, and Los Angeles is real.

I'm not in the business of enterprise. I'm in the business of helping people. That's what I truly see a Los Angeles City Council mem-



ber should do — help the people of the City. To make them believe in the City. To make those who work for the City believe in the City — that's when good things happen and all boats rise.

Much of what I do is instinctive. I get a thought and I say we should do it. It's not like I sit and plan all this out here.

Will there ever be more Tom LaBonges?

TOM: I hope so. It's just service to the people. I don't want to critique myself. That's for others to look at. But I've really enjoyed my 39.6 years of service. It's like I've been playing for the Dodgers.

Are you going to be taking more pictures after you leave?

TOM: Well, I have taken a lot of pictures. I was the second artist to have an exhibit on the Bridge Gallery in 1978.

We can always use you to run our Picture Perfect contest.

TOM: I don't like contests.

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Tom LaBonge in the pages of *Alive!*

FROM ALIVE!, SEPTEMBER 2003

The Red Car Gets on Track

■ Trolley line for citizens, tourists gets a rousing birth. It was built with pride by City employees.



From left: the Honorable Tom LaBonge, Councilman, 4th District, City of Los Angeles; Bob Henry, Red Car Project Manager, and the Honorable Janice Hahn, Councilwoman, 15th District (Harbor), City of Los Angeles.

St. Patricks Day Parade



APRIL 2010: Mr. LA, Councilmember and Club Member Tom LaBonge, who sponsored the festival, meets with festival-goers.

FROM THE PAGES OF *Alive!*

Chinese New Year

■ Chinatown celebrates with a grand parade.

CHINATOWN — In celebrating more than 100 years of tradition, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles presented the 107th Golden Dragon Parade Feb. 4, continuing a tradition that has become the premiere cultural event in the Southern California Asian-American Community, according to event organizers.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, City Councilmembers, the Police Dept. and Transportation were on hand. Since the mid-1980s, the Golden Dragon Parade has expanded to include more than 100 floats, marching bands, cars, government officials, various digni-

GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY



NOVEMBER 2006: Hands raised! From left: Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member; Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Dr. Ed Krupp, Observatory Director and Club Member.



APRIL 2009: Mr. L.A., Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member (right), rode his bike during the parade.

FROM ALIVE!, OCTOBER 2005

LaBonge Cooks

■ Councilman Tom LaBonge hosts barbecue for Fourth District-area employees.

Story by Liz Montes, Club Counselor
Photos by Angel Gomez, Member Services Manager

COUNCIL — Councilmember Tom LaBonge and the staff of the Fourth District invited City

FROM ALIVE!, JANUARY 2003

City Retirees Continue Their Holiday Party Tradition in Style



Fourth District Councilman Tom LaBonge and RLACEI President Ed Harding new officers (not in order in photograph) Neil Ricci, Jerry Bardwell, Jack M. Dave Wilkins and Helen Salgado. New officer Ken Spiker was busy playing

FROM ALIVE!, MARCH 2004

Saenz, Heggem Retire With 91 Years of Service to City



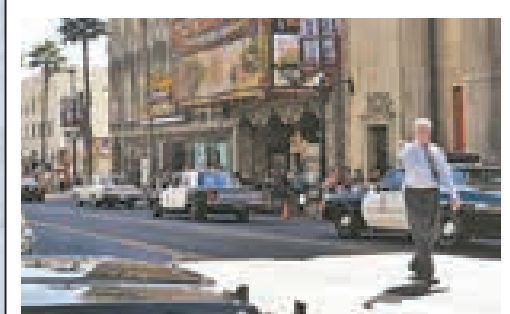
Councilman Tom LaBonge (center) awards Jim Heggem (left) and Daniel Saenz with loaves of bread at their retirement reception.

FROM ALIVE!, NOVEMBER 2004

Council

That's a Big 10-4!

Councilman Tom LaBonge hosts annual police car parade.



Councilman Tom LaBonge (right) directs vintage police cars to join his 10-4 Day Parade along Hollywood Boulevard.

On Oct. 2, Mr. LA, Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member, joined officers from the LAPD, California Highway Patrol and the Sheriff's Office to speak about public safety issues at the 11th annual 10-4 Day Parade. The event took place at the LAFD Fire Museum at old Station 27 in Hollywood.

Special guests included radio host "Shantown" Tom Kelly, actors from famous TV police

The LaBonge Legacy

What do you think other people are going to say about the great Tom LaBonge?

TOM: Let them say it, whatever it is.

Proud Club Member

TOM: You know, I think I've been in the Club Store nine times and missed you every time.

I know. They always call me afterward.

TOM: Do they tell you?

As soon as you leave. "John, you're not going to believe who was here."

TOM: Oh, no.

"And he wanted to say hi." I'm sorry when that happens.

TOM: It's okay.

You've been a Club Member for years, so, thank you for that. What the Club does is unique, and we're a non-profit. There's no other city that I know that publishes a paper about its employees, like this anyhow. It's usually just a newsletter or something.

TOM: What I like about *Alive!* when I look through it – I see all these other departments, and we talk about City family. There's a family out there.

Exactly.

TOM: Not everybody participates in it. But then, when you see all the 911 communications operators have a function, or all the people out at Scattergood have a function, or the people out at Tillman Water Reclamation Plant, or something in the Fire Department, it's a City family.

They're all brothers and sisters.

TOM: Right. It's important to see that we're all connected.

There's a little bit of a struggle between the people who are critiquing government, and they ask, "Why do we do what we do?" If we remember the people whom we serve, that's why. There was a big tree on Eucalyptus Street at Griffith Park Boulevard that fell. I was there in the morning. The City guys pulled down some lines. The press came out. By the afternoon, the five guys from Public Works got it all done. Boom, they did the job. That's special. Given the right resources, they can do anything. Given the leadership, they can do anything. And it's been tough, because the team has been shrunk from what we once had. We've got to rethink how we do it. But never rethink the commitment that you have to the people.

Final To-Do List

What are you working on between now and July 1? What things do you really want to complete?

TOM: Well, there are a couple of things in the parks department that I want to push forward. I've got to deal with the Greek Theatre matter which operator will be chosen for subsequent years. Replanting the trees in Griffith Park from the fire, because it's taken a long time for the department to get back on track.

Urban Forestry is very committed, and on a number of Saturdays, they worked overtime to get all the dead trees out, and now we're replanting, which is a real big thing. The best thing about it is Johnny Sanchez, a tree trimmer. Johnny comes to me and he shows me his phone and says, "Hey, did your mother teach school in Los Angeles, East LA?" And my mother did. Well, Johnny's wife, Mary Sanchez, was taught by my mother 40 years ago, and Mary remembered.

Can you talk about some of the issues that you fought for, and why they're important to you?

TOM: I would love to have seen us embrace our parks more. Maybe one of the reasons we didn't was, in the 1930s, 90 percent of all the people lived in single-family dwellings. From San Pedro to whatever portion of the Valley was developed, from Burrough Heights to March Vista and Venice, it was single-family. So we never were great park people.

Because you had your yard.

TOM: Right. You had your yard.

Now that's not the case.

TOM: We need our public space. My friend, the late, great Huell Howser on KCET, did shows on people in Los Angeles taking stay-cations. Instead of going away, they would vacation in Southern California, even though they live here. That's why more people are hiking than ever before, which is good.

Griffith Observatory.

TOM: I love Dr. Krupp. He is the number one City Employee in the universe; correct? Do we agree?

In the universe?

TOM: In the universe.

I get it ... but yes, we agree. He's a Club Member, too.

TOM: IN 1992, we had a press conference to start the small taxation that needed to pass park bond issues for the renovation and expansion of the observatory, and I was able to encourage John Ferraro that we could do things. We had great citizens involved in that, like Leonard Nimoy, Samuel Oschinn, fighting for it. That was a big plus. Fighting for the zoo was a big plus.

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"It's been an honor. Success comes from collaboration with great City employees."

– Tom LaBonge



FROM ALIVE!, MARCH 2006

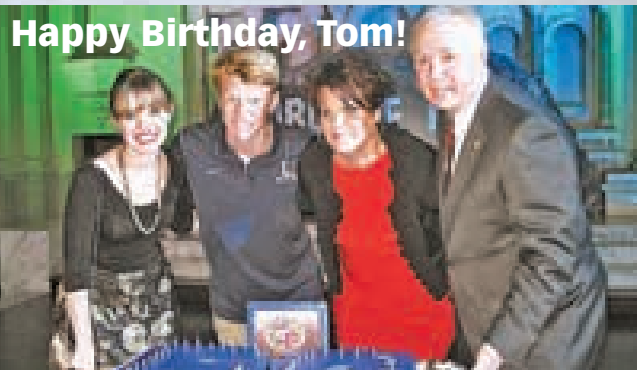


Councilmember Tom LaBonge greets the crowd.



From left: Arvin Lopez, Engineering; Chris Guerrero, Engineering; Raul Garcia, Engineering; Councilman Tom LaBonge; Jerry Del Rosario, Engineering; and Ann Karling, Engineering.

Happy Birthday, Tom!



NOVEMBER 2003: Councilman Tom LaBonge (right) celebrated his birthday with his family, from left: daughter, Mary-Cate LaBonge; son, Charles LaBonge; and wife, Brigid LaBonge.

FROM ALIVE!, SEPTEMBER 2014

Council

Mettle to the Pedals

Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member, leads his final bike ride for the summer.

On Aug. 6, iconic Hollywood was the focal point of the Tour LaBonge, the fifth and final night of Councilmember LaBonge's annual bike series. The Councilmember launched the annual tours in 2008 to highlight the stunning landscape of Los Angeles while promoting the health and environmental benefits of bicycling. Cyclists and community members rode through Hollywood to celebrate some of the city's highlights and to promote cycling in Los Angeles.

The Tour LaBonge bike rides are fun, free events that promote cycling as a cost-conscious, environmentally friendly and healthy form of transportation. The past four evening rides, all in July, covered routes of about 12 miles and include police escorts that led, accompanied and followed the group to ensure traffic safety. The rides were conducted as tours of various neighborhoods, including (in order) downtown Los Angeles, Griffith Park, Sherman Oaks, Toluca Lake, and lastly, Hollywood. Riders were required to wear helmets and sign liability waivers.



Mr. LA, Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member, leads his final bike ride of the summer in front of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on Wilshire Boulevard.

Story and photos courtesy Councilman LaBonge's office

THE ALIVE! FEATURE

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW
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I was just going to ask about the zoo.

TOM: I love the zoo and I love the people who work at the zoo.

It looks awesome.

TOM: An urban zoo is important to get to nature. You can't look at it on a screen. When I argued for the zoo, a lot of people said, "Well, they could go online and see it." It's not online. You want to smell it and you want to see it; you want to hear it, and you want to go to it a lot. It's your child seeing it. When I took my children to the zoo, I'd probably have some official calendar events, being a Councilman. So sometimes I'd try to go to only half the zoo, because of my schedule. But my kids would always object - "Dad, we didn't see ..." and they'd know where it was. I couldn't fool them.

What about the film industry?

TOM: I helped Paramount Pictures expand when I worked for John Ferraro. Film is so important to the City.

Ends, and Beginnings

After you leave, are you planning to travel?

TOM: I hope to. But I've got to get permission from Mrs. LaBonge, my wife, Brigid.



From left: Club CEO John Hawkins and Councilman Tom LaBonge, Club Member take a "selfie."

We're going to miss you.

Tom LaBonge: Well, thank you. I will miss you.

Seriously. Because there's really no one like you with the energy, the love, and the enthusiasm.

So let's try this one final time in a different way: Write your headline. Try to sum up your long career - you've been working for the City since you were 22 or so - in a headline that could go on the cover of our paper.

TOM: It goes fast. I hope there's somebody in the City who's 22 right now, and who reads this, who might be working for the City in 2054. That's a 39-year career, just like mine. Somebody here in our pool of employees may

have the same opportunity I have had. How different will it be? I lived before there were cell phones. How did I use the phone back then? I stopped by the firehouse often or the library, and borrowed the phone. Or if I knew a little deli or a little market where I knew the folks and could borrow their phone; that's the only way you communicated. Then, we used to have two-way radios. That's how we used to talk, through the City operator, to your office, and then they'd patch you in.

The headline can be only five words.

TOM: Oh, no, no, no, no.

Okay I'll give you a few more words. But I'm trying to get you to sum up what you think your legacy is.

TOM: I would just say, thank you, City Employees, for helping me help the people.

We see the colored Post-Its on the photos on your walls in your office. Are the Post-Its related to your plans to move out of City Hall?

TOM: Well, Mrs. LaBonge gave me a strict order that I can't bring everything home. I'm going to talk to the schools that my parents went to, Mount St. Mary's and Loyola Marymount, about taking some of the books. I have a lot of books on Los Angeles. I've already given stuff to Glenn Gleason in our Library Department. You should really do a feature on him. He's the map guy.

You've either worked in City Hall or around it for most of your career. What do you think you're going to feel when you walk out of here for the last time?

TOM: I'll feel good that I was able to do what I did because I did it with others. I didn't

do it alone. I had a great staff that has helped me all along the way; great opportunities, and knowledge. My parents really knew the City. So when I leave here, it will be something.

But I'm just saying I know who I am and what I've accomplished, and I feel I've done a great job. I'm proud of this building. I'm proud of the people who thought to build it. Just think if they didn't have a vision. They said Los Angeles is going to be special. That's something that's special to me.

There are so many things to do after I leave. I'll still be coming around. I don't know where I'll end up. I was looking at five things, and now there's only four.

What are those?

TOM: Well, I plan to volunteer for the Special Olympics, which all City Employees should do. That's this summer.

Do you want to stay tethered to the City?

TOM: I do. Somehow.

Do you know how, yet? What are your plans?

TOM: I don't know.

I know everyone asks you.

TOM: I want to finish strong.

Tell us more about those four opportunities you mentioned.

TOM: I'm looking at water issues because I've been involved in water issues over my career. High-speed rail is something I believe in and it's really important for the future of Los Angeles. If we have high-speed rail into Union Station, including the run-through tracks, it's going to transform this part of downtown in a big way. Another one is arts and entertainment, and athletics, if football comes. I worked 24 years with the National Football League, NFL Films, as an assistant cameraman. And lastly, just general tourism. I think that's real important.

I think of this [LaBonge grabs a poster of The Wizard of Oz]. This right here, you know what Dorothy said?

"There's no place like home?"

TOM: This is my home.

It's your Oz.

TOM: It is. You go across the Sixth Street Bridge, the view toward downtown looks like you're going into Oz, the way this town's built.

I'll still be hiking every day in Griffith Park, which I do. I started hiking in Griffith Park every day in 1978. I take care of a garden there called Dante's View. I'll still be doing that. But I'm going to take a break because this has been intense.

Nobody's lasted this long in public service without being liked. You've talked a lot about other people. But you're one of a kind.

TOM: Well, thank you. I feel like Gary Cooper in *Pride of the Yankees*, when he made his speech at Yankee Stadium. This has been the greatest career that I could have imagined. My former Chief of Field Operations, Roy Fitzpatrick, said I was born to do this.

I'd agree.

TOM: It's been very special. I will always stand up for Los Angeles because it's very special. We'd better believe in ourselves.

Yes, sir.

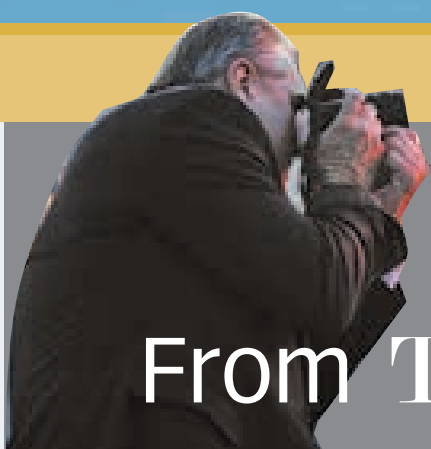
TOM: *Adios.*

Adios, Tom. And thanks.

TOM: Thank you, Los Angeles. ■

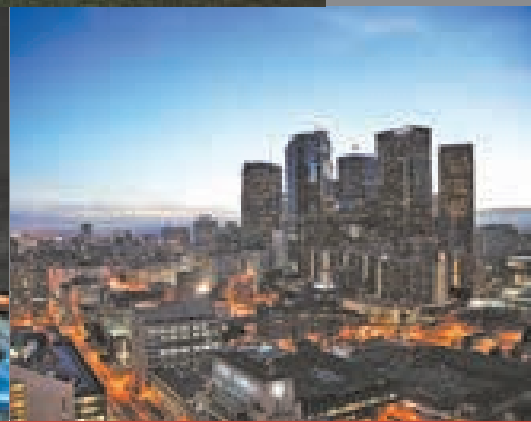
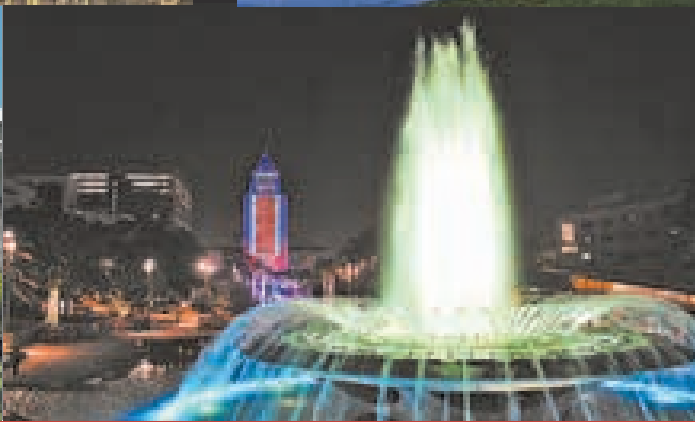


The LaBonge Legacy



From Tom's Lens

Every year, Tom LaBonge publishes and distributes a calendar of his own photographs. Here is a selection of shots that he considers some of his favorites.



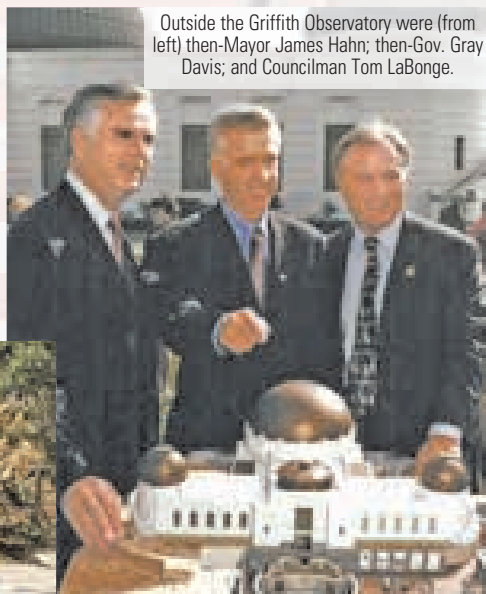
The World of Tom LaBonge

In the City, sometimes it seems it's Tom LaBonge's world ... and we're all only living in it. Here is a collection of photos from the Los Angeles Public Library. Enjoy!

Mayor Tom Bradley acts as umpire, and Tom LaBonge, aide to Councilman John Ferraro, is at bat. Aug. 14, 1979.



Outside the Griffith Observatory were (from left) then-Mayor James Hahn; then-Gov. Gray Davis; and Councilman Tom LaBonge.



Tom LaBonge with a DWP crew in Griffith Park, 2004.



Tom LaBonge atop City Hall, 2006.

At the celebration of LA's 224th birthday, Tom LaBonge interviews Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa for ITA's LA Cityview Channel 35. Sept. 4, 2005.



The LaBonge brothers, from left: Brian, Steven, Denis, Chris, Tim, Bob, Tom and Mark. From 1991.