

Would you like to sit inside or out?

by Capt. Christine L. Kunz
photos by Master Sgt. Lono Kollars

Where else but in a city twice the size of Switzerland can Airmen live in a house on the Pacific Ocean and still have the cultural feel of a land-locked metropolis.

Los Angeles holds many distinctions, and for many Airmen stationed at Los Angeles Air Force Base, it's a "place of opportunity."

Los Angeles is the entertainment

capital of the world, a cultural mecca boasting more than 300 museums and a paradise of good weather, all in one. From tourist attractions like its 72 miles of pristine coastline to Hollywood's Walk of Fame collection of stars — numbering more than 2,250 and still growing — Airmen feel this city is "the place to be."

"There are so many opportunities here," said 23-year-old 2nd Lt. Jen-

nifer Berger, a space systems project engineer who has been stationed at the base for a little more than a year. "No matter your interest, there's something for you."

This single native from Lima, Ohio, took quick advantage of being in a place where living on the beach, usually reserved as a luxury, is actually a way of life. Everyday she wakes up to the sounds of crash-

ing waves and can step outside her apartment to the warmth of sand between her toes.

"I was definitely attracted to the beach," she admitted. "I never thought I'd get into something like surfing, being from Ohio. When I was first stationed here I used to go surfing every weekend. That took me to different parts of central and southern California. I've seen

a lot of the coastline, from Pismo Beach to San Clemente, including the exclusive spots available to

"In Santa Monica on the boulevard, you'll have to dodge those in-line skaters, or they'll knock you down" ... or so the Savage Garden lyrics warn. The pier, built in 1908, and the newly added two-acre Pacific Park, with its rides and midway games, are iconic recreational and entertainment venues. Thursday nights throughout the summer, more than 10,000 people flock to concerts featuring popular performers in every musical genre.



Los Angeles Entertainment Liaison Office

Did you know the Air Force also has men and women in blue serving in Hollywood? The Air Force's Los Angeles Entertainment Liaison Office sits atop the 12th floor of the Openheimer Building in the heart of Hollywood.

This seven-person office directly serves the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs with a mission of defending the Air Force image in motion pictures and television, and sending military messages onto the big screen [See "Flights, Camera, Action!" June 1997].

"We project and protect [the Air Force]," said Chuck Davis, chief of the television and motion picture branch of this

public affairs field office.

Since most young men and women get their impressions of the Air Force from pop culture products, Mr. Davis said, it's important for the Air Force to have a role in motion pictures and television.

Walking into this office is like walking into a production studio. Movie posters or "one sheets" as industry people call them, adorn the walls, showcasing movies the Air Force has assisted with. For example, crossing the length of the conference room wall is the movie poster for the NBC mini-series "Asteroid," and "Air Force One's" poster is splashed across the opposite wall.

For Master Sgt. Paul Firman, an Air Force broadcaster for 16 years, coming to the office a year and a half ago was a different move in his career, but one he felt was very important.

"We represent the entire Air Force to the entertainment industry," the office superintendent said. "It's not about hobnobbing with the stars. We work with the middle man and network."

Several movie and television scripts find their way to this office each month, but only a select few get the "green light" for Air Force cooperation. The department only assists with projects that serve public information goals and boost recruitment and retention — its main goals. This is also why the office is now getting the Air Force into more high-tech video games, bringing the service in line with what the next generation of bluesuiters is doing with its time.

First Lt. Mary Danner, deputy chief of television and motion pictures, is the newest member of the office, having arrived in March.

"This is such a unique way to tell the Air Force story. It's much more captivating," she said. "It's not a glamorous job; we're doing staff work and building relationships."

"We have such a cool Air Force; it sells itself," Sergeant Firman added.

So the next time you see the television series "Stargate SG-1," the movie "The Sum of All Fears," or watch a music video by Maria Carey or Hootie and the Blowfish, think twice about what went into putting that together. Perhaps your fellow Airmen in the Los Angeles office had a role in how our service was portrayed.

For more information, go to www.airforcehollywood.af.mil.

— Capt. Christine L. Kunz

military members on Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base. Another unique aspect of being stationed at L.A. is the opportunity to experience a great variety of live music. Anywhere you go you can find great live music."

No matter where you go in the beach cities, there's something for everyone — biking or rollerblading

along the beach on the cement-lined "strand," or letting the kids play in the sand while you sip drinks and watch the sun set over the California coast.

But not only does Los Angeles boast its beaches, it's also the city of motion pictures and television shows and the place for everything cool and hip. For many new here, there's

one landmark that says "Hollywood" to the world — literally — the white letters of the Hollywood sign, perched atop Mount Lee, the tallest peak in the city.

So in a place where the sun shines 292 days of the year, Airman 1st Class Jwon Wiggins agrees it's not only the beach that attracts people.

"I looked forward to coming here," the 20-year-old medical technician said. "They have every type of food and great clubs. I even skied for the first time." Even though Airman Wiggins doesn't live on the beach, he loves his housing arrangement at the enlisted dorms at Fort MacArthur [See "California Dream," June 1999].

"I have my own kitchen, my own bathroom and a walk-in closet. This is the best dorm I've been in."

Even after your feet touch every grain of sand along the beach or every star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and you've bought an autographed movie poster of your favorite film, you'll find you aren't finished with Los Angeles yet.

"I had misconceptions of L.A.," said 1st Lt. David Miller, a 32-year-old husband and father. "I had in mind what was in the movies. You realize there are bad parts, but L.A. is no different than any other city."

The space-based infrared systems international affairs project officer, stationed at the base for two years, is happy that he can take his family to the beach on Thanksgiving Day and actually swim.

"You will find you'll enjoy it here," he said. "There's just so much to do. Everything's outside. The first questions you always seem to get asked [at a restaurant] are 'how many' and 'inside or out?' That's pretty cool." ☺

Sea kayaking, a simple and serene way to explore the southern coastline (and avoid some of the crowds) is all the rage in Southern California. The base organizes and conducts activities to area attractions, including biking, rock climbing and sea kayaking excursions.



The Hollywood sign measures 450 feet long, its letters are 45 feet high, and it's visible from all parts of Hollywood. Erected in 1923 as an advertising sign for a real estate development in Beachwood Canyon, the sign originally read "Hollywoodland." The last four letters were removed in 1945, after Hollywood had become the world's movie capital and the sign had already become a well-known landmark.

Los Angeles AFB at a glance

Mission: To deliver unrivaled space, missile and joint information capabilities and systems to the joint warfighter and the nation.

Location: In Southern California, four miles south of Los Angeles International Airport in the city of El Segundo.

Getting around: By air — Los Angeles International Airport is the third busiest airport in the world. It handles thousands of domestic and international commercial flights every year and offers a free, frequent shuttle bus connecting it with the Green Line Light Rail. By road — Los Angeles is known for heavy traffic and a shortage of parking places, yet Angelenos love their cars and drive everywhere. There are 27 freeways that, if placed end-to-end, would stretch 615 miles.

Population: Los Angeles is the second largest city in the nation with 17 million. Los Angeles Air Force Base — about 1,416 military, 1,121 federal civilians and 2,073 support contractors.

History: Sept. 4, 1781, is Los Angeles' official birth date when 44 "vecinos pobladores" — village settlers from the Mexican provinces of Sonora and Sinaloa — made their home in what is now downtown Los Angeles. Here to greet them was a tribe of Indians called Yangna. The Spanish named the new settlement "El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles," or the town of the Queen of the Angels. After the territory changed hands from Spain to Mexico, the town was officially declared a city in 1835. In August 1846, American Soldiers entered Los Angeles, and the Stars and Stripes began flying over the city five months later. Los Angeles Air Force Base is home to the Space and Missile Systems Center which traces its roots to the Cold War in July 1954. The original Air Force objective was to develop an operational intercontinental ballistic missile system before the Soviet Union. In 1956, the Air Force began developing its first military satellite systems and began assigning its programs to people in Los Angeles. Since the Cold War, the center continued to develop and acquire launch vehicles and satellites.

Climate: Southern California's climate has often been described as "perfect." It's mostly sunny, with an average of 292 days of sun, and warm with gentle ocean breezes in the summer. Temperatures reach an average high of 83 degrees in the summer and a low of 45 in the winter. The humidity is low with little rain. The last time it snowed in Los Angeles was in January 1949 with only three-tenths of an inch.

Cost of living: Community housing is expensive, with a one-bedroom apartment ranging from \$640 to \$1,250 a month; two bedrooms can cost \$750 to \$1,400 per month. Military families find the base housing units to be among the best in the Air Force. Most were built in the last decade and are located in San Pedro, approximately 18 miles from the base, overlooking the San Pedro Bay. Divided among historic Fort MacArthur, Pacific Heights and Pacific Crest, these units include two-, three- and four-bedroom units. Additional housing is currently being constructed.

Education: Los Angeles Unified School District is the second

largest school district in the country, with 60 to 70 percent of its graduates pursuing higher education. Los Angeles is home to 176 colleges and universities, including three campuses of the University of California and seven campuses of the California State University system. Many private colleges are also in the area, including the University of Southern California, Pepperdine, Loyola Marymount, Occidental, Art Center of College and Design, and California Institute of Technology.

Recreation: Los Angeles is the only place where you can go surfing in the morning and snowboarding in the afternoon. You can play tennis, go rollerblading on the "strand" (cement walkways that line the beaches), mountain bike, ice skate, hike or play a round of 18 at one of dozens of golf courses. Aside from that, pool lounging is probably a favorite activity. But for change of pace, the city also offers some 300 museums, a host of nightclubs, concerts and plenty of theme parks.

Want more info? www.losangeles.af.mil; www.elsegundo.chamber.org; www.ci.la.ca.us; www.afcrossroads.com.

One person's perception of reality isn't everyone's. But all it takes is one person with a skewed sense of the truth to spread rumors and change that reality.

During a recent trip to Colorado Springs, Colo., I came across an individual who spoke his mind about a strong topic of interest — the alleged sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy. He

knew I was heading to the academy, and that egged him on to share his thoughts.

"Heading to the academy I see," he said. "Well make sure you take a look at the sign they have hanging over the railroad tracks just after the entrance. It really is funny, considering all that's going on there. You'll know what I mean when you see it."

I thought maybe he was giving me something interesting to add to my story. But that's until I actually saw the sign the next day:

**"FALCON PRIDE
CHARACTER, HONOR,
INTEGRITY, SERVICE & EXCELLENCE"**

Perception certainly is in the eye of the beholder. I was a bit confused about what he was trying to tell me. He gave the impression that what was happening at the academy had definitely taken its toll outside its gates — external reality.

Before checking into lodging, I went to a local fast-food restaurant outside the academy and saw posters of Air Force aircraft covering the walls. The glass partitions separating the tables were etched in Air Force regalia. This was definitely a town proud of its Air Force, despite the thoughts of the one person I met.

And then, after spending a full 24 hours with the cadets, I saw for myself the reality in truth — first-hand.

Arriving on the academy grounds over a holiday gave

me the opportunity to look around and get a sense of life there. I half-expected the cadets to be marching around in mandatory formations or at least begin to feel the burden of an enormous media frenzy. Instead, after the 24 hours spent with the cadets — eating in the dining hall, spending social time after classes with them,

even attending classes — I walked away with an impression far different from

the one I was forming the night I arrived.

These cadets were very concerned about what people were thinking. They felt they were being portrayed unfairly and that every little thing was being blown out of proportion in the press. They vowed to remain upbeat, fully intent on proving what was being reported and what was being thought by many in the public was wrong. They were proud to be students at this institution and took their roles as future officers very seriously. They still had character, honor, integrity, service and excellence, exactly as that sign

by Master Sgt. Ken Wright

In the Eye of the Beholder

read. It deserved to be there.

On the last day of my trip, a young boy cemented the perception of what really was reality for these cadets. Since part of the academy grounds is open to visitors, cadets are literally watched every day by people from around the world. Impressions are instantly formed (or sometimes reformed), and the saying I heard the cadets use, "Always on parade," took shape. This young boy was visiting the academy with his family, and as he watched a few of the cadets walking around I overheard him say to his parents, "I want to be just like them."

Everyone's entitled to opinions and everyone's entitled to express opinions. But one shouldn't do so without knowing all the facts. That's how rumors spread and negative attitudes swell. It's a good thing I waited before forming an opinion. Spending time with the cadets certainly helped set me straight. If only everyone could've seen and learned as I did. Or as that young boy innocently did. ☺

— Capt. Christine L. Kunz

Cadets from the Air Force Academy donate thousands of hours of community service each

year, and by doing so help influence public perception of the institution. One of the programs the Cadet Wing shares a particular fondness for is the "Cadet for a Day" program. The program started in 2000 through the Make a Wish Foundation and provides young people facing severe physical challenges the opportunity to experience life as a cadet. Typically, the child gets to don a flightsuit and flight cap and participates in a host of cadet activities. These include a mission briefing at the 94th Flying Training Squadron, a tour of the airfield and sometimes an orientation ride in one of the academy's cadet flight training aircraft.

