

The Story of Joe Giannini (1915-2009)

Joseph Giannini was born on July 28, 1915 in Portland Oregon in an Italian immigrant family.¹ His lifetime residency and contributions to Morro Bay came by chance. While on a fishing expedition on the California coast, he discovered a fisherman, whose boat was in distress. Giannini helped the fisherman by escorting them to the nearest harbor; coincidentally, it was the Morro Bay harbor.² Falling in love with the area, Giannini decided to stay in Morro Bay for the rest of his life. Little did people know that this would change the history and future of Morro Bay. Giannini played an active role in the fishing industry, the preservation of Morro Rock and the city's politics.

Some of Giannini's greatest impacts were in the Morro Bay's commercial fishing industry. Its continuity today occurs in part due to his actions. He solidified his role as a major community activist by running his family-owned marine supply shop for 46 years and building a strong political presence. Not only did Giannini recognize and strive for the improvement of the city, but he held this same faith among community members. Jeremiah O'Brien, a former board member of the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization, recalls a moment 26 years before, when he was just starting out as a fisherman. Broke and lacking gear, O'Brien went to Giannini's Marine Supply Store. Giannini declared with unwavering support, "It's okay, you've got unlimited credit here. Pay us when you can."³ This trust and optimism in others served him well as an advocate in the industry to preserve this way of life in Morro Bay. He exemplifies the independence of being "captain of your own ship" and acting for the needs of society.⁴



Joe Giannini is a leader in fight to save the fishing fleet. 5

In 1964, Giannini contributed to the

¹ "Giannini.Html." *Oldmorrobay.Com*, 2019, <http://www.oldmorrobay.com>.

² "Giannini.Html."

³ Chawkins, Steve. "Morro Bay Fishing Fleet Losing a Rock." *Los Angeles Times*, 2006, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-mar-11-me-morrobay11-s.

⁴ Middlecamp, David. "Exhibit Catches life of the fisherman." *New York Times*, 2006, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&t=custom%3ACustBucket2%21San%20Luis%20County%3AD&page=2&fld-base=0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base=0=>.

⁵ Overend, W. (1981, Feb 20). "Morro bay's hang-up." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995), 20 Feb. 1981, pp. 5-e1.

ProQuest,

<http://ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/morrobay/docview/52694218?accountid=10362>.



Picture taken at Jerry's Marine and Tackle in Morro Bay.

transformation of a collection of fishermen's shacks and vacation homes into the registered city of Morro Bay.⁶ He later helped to stop the Army Corps of Engineers from mining Morro Rock for road-fill in the early 60's.⁷ This was before the city had registered the rock as a historical landmark. The loss of Morro Bay's iconic rock would have been devastating to the community and without Giannini, the rock could have been destroyed. In an interview with Slo Coast journalist Jack McCurdy, Giannini recalls his conversation with the Army Corps Commander: "Morro Rock is being so defaced that it is not going to be Morro Rock any more... there is only one Morro Rock."⁸ These events were the key reasons why Giannini was later elected as the second mayor of Morro Bay in 1968.⁹



Material being extracted from
Morro Rock for road-fill.

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As a politician, Giannini was very well liked by the people and always displayed an outspoken love for the community of Morro Bay. He did his best to make decisions with the citizens' interests in mind. One of Giannini's accomplishments was proposing and passing measure D in 1981.¹⁰ Measure D was a piece of legislature meant to protect commercial and recreational fishing in the town of Morro Bay. More specifically, it set aside waterfront property between Beach Street and Target Rock for the purpose of serving or facilitating non-commercial or commercial fishing activities. Today, Giannini's legacy lives on through the fishing industry that remains.

Once Giannini finished his career as a public servant, he continued serving his beloved town of Morro Bay as a private citizen. Giannini was well known for his purchase of the Morro Bay Sun newspaper because he wanted to give a balanced report of the town's issues. Giannini wrote about numerous issues facing the town including banning vehicles from the beach, direct election of the mayor, and formation of the Coastal Commission.¹²

⁶ Chawkins.

⁷ Chawkins.

⁸ Shelton, Gene. "Slo Coast Journal - Recalls In Morro Bay: Then And Now." *Slocoastjournal.Net*, 2019, http://slocoastjournal.net/docs/archives/2014/jan/pages/news/recall_history.html.

⁹ "Giannini.Html."

¹⁰ Stedjee, Linda. "Are Morro Bay Officials Attempting To Chip Away At Measure D?". *Cal Coast News*, 2019, <https://calcoastnews.com/2016/08/morro-bay-officials-attempting-chip-away-measure-d/>.

¹¹ "Building the Causeway... 1934-1936" <http://www.oldmorrobay.com/causeway.html>.

¹² Shelton.

Although Giannini is no longer around today, the changes he implemented lead to positive change in Morro Bay, and continue to impact the way of life of the people that reside there today.

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