

# ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## After School



Bill, Theresa O'Hare: met at law firm, first date at Hotel Laguna restaurant

## O'Hares Stay Active in Laguna; Met in Law Office Romance

■ By MICHAEL VOLPE

**B**ill and Theresa O'Hare's sons have moved on from Laguna Beach's schools. They haven't.

The couple started out as concerned parents as their boys went through school. Now they're virtually synonymous with the Laguna Beach Unified School District, where Theresa is an elected board member and Bill is president of its foundation.

With their kids now off to college, the O'Hares haven't pulled back.

"We're as involved in Laguna Beach schools as when our kids were in the schools," said Bill O'Hare, managing partner at the Costa Mesa office of Phoenix-based Snell & Wilmer LLP. "It's actually less stressful and more rewarding because you don't have any direct personal stake but are more of an interested participant."

The O'Hares' work has made them fixtures in Laguna Beach.

Theresa, who was a paralegal before quitting work to raise sons Billy and Brendan, played a big part in starting the district's SchoolPower Endowment Foundation in 2001.

She's also been among the most aggressive advocates of bonds benefiting the district's schools.

Theresa has served on nearly every district volunteer board and committee, including the Parent Teacher Association. She was elected to the board in 2007.

In 2002, she helped start the Laguna Beach Performing Arts program to help preserve the arts in schools as state budget cuts were doing away with them.

Bill, a business litigator and 31-year Laguna Beach resident, now is president of the foundation.

SchoolPower raises money for the district through annual fundraisers and a community campaign. It also controls a permanent fund, built from money SchoolPower raises and donor contributions. Money from the fund goes to schools for everything from school supplies to foreign language classes.

Theresa served as the foundation's first and only president until 2007, when she left to run for the board. Bill then was enlisted to run the foundation, creating something of an O'Hare dynasty.

At first, Bill joined just as a member of the foundation's board.

"About three months later, they made me president," he said.

Under the O'Hares, the foundation has raised \$2.2 million, most under Theresa and about \$500,000 under Bill.

The foundation recently funded a \$500,000, 10-year grant for a new foreign language program, as well as a smaller grant for digital cameras for Laguna Beach High School's art department.

The couple's continued work for Laguna schools has helped offset the impact of their sons going off to college—one to New York University and then to the University of Iowa, the other to University of California, Berkeley.

"We haven't felt a great void because so much of what we already were doing still is actively involved in our lives," Bill said.

He said he uses his empty nest status to appeal to others who used to have kids in the district.

"This is really how you can stay connected with all those people our kids grew up with and became friends with," he said.

### Small District

The district is small compared to others in Orange County. Laguna has two elementary schools, one middle school and a high school, made famous by reality TV show "Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County."

Theresa goes to every PTA meeting, every school opening and every graduation.

Given the size of the district, "Theresa's board experience is probably, very different from any other board members' experience in the larger districts," Bill said.

Her decision to run for the district board came from looking at what she would do once her boys left for college.

"I'd done every job in the district as far as volunteering goes," she said. "It only made sense to help shape it too."

The O'Hares have gotten more involved with the University of California, Irvine.

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## O'Hares

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Bill has been working with the Chief Executive Roundtable, a group of executives that looks to boost ties between the school and business.

At one roundtable retreat, Bill broke out his Elvis Presley impersonation, singing "Blue Suede Shoes" and "Can't Help Falling in Love."

He's also advising on UC Irvine's new law school.

Theresa works with early childhood development committees at UCI.

She recently was contacted by UC Berkeley—where son Brendan is studying physics—to be a member of its parent advisory board.

She'd work with Brendan to set up tours for incoming students and their parents.

Bill also is active in the Orange County Bar Association. He works with a program called Short Stop that exposes young people and their parents to jail and inmates as a deterrent.

"It's pretty harsh," he said.

### Relationship

Bill and Theresa's relationship didn't blossom in school—it began as an office romance.

He was an associate at former law firm Wenke, Taylor, Evans and Ikola in Newport Beach, where he met Theresa, a paralegal, working on a family law case.



**Bill O'Hare:** "One of my first challenges was to convert Theresa into a Laguna-ite"



**Theresa O'Hare:** "We've got one (son) in the PAC 10 and another in the Big 10, which is fun"

"Our first date was at the Hotel Laguna," Bill said.

Bill joined the firm in 1978, right after graduating from University of California Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. Theresa started a year later after graduating from UCI's paralegal program.

When the relationship became known among the senior partners, "They basically said, 'I really hope this works out for you Bill. Because if we have to choose between Theresa and you, you're the one who is leaving,'" Bill said.

They were married in Hawaii a year after their first date.

Theresa continued to work at Wenke, Taylor before the couple's first son was born. She worked part-time until their second son was born.

She then left to be a stay-at-home mom.

"I was literally sick when I gave up that job because I have worked all my life," Theresa said. "There were times where I didn't think this stay-at-home thing was going to work for me."

Theresa, who grew up in Hawthorne, has taken to Laguna, seeming to know everyone and anyone. But it took some convincing to get her to move there, Bill said.

"One of my first challenges was to convert Theresa into a Laguna-ite," said Bill, a Maryland native. "Now Theresa is a bigger Laguna-ite than I am. I'm known as Theresa's husband."

Bill and Theresa live off Bluebird Canyon in the house they bought together when they were first married.

They spend most of their free time in Laguna, eating out at restaurants or cooking for friends.

### Sons

They also enjoy having their sons visit.

Oldest son Billy graduated from New York University with degrees in journalism and political science. He now attends law school at the University of Iowa.

Their youngest son, Brendan, is a sophomore at UC Berkeley.

Having kids in college has made the O'Hares big college football fans.

"We've got one in the PAC 10 and another in the Big 10, which is kind of fun," Theresa said. ■