

Eleanor Roosevelt visited naval hospital in Norco and left a gift



The metal sundial at the former U. S. Naval Hospital in Norco was dedicated by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt during her visit to the facility in April 1943. (Courtesy of Brigitte Jouxte)



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PUBLISHED: May 28, 2026 at 10:00 AM PDT

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Recently at the annual Corona Founders' Day dinner, reader and Norco Councilmember Kevin Bash told me of a surprise gift that had been installed years earlier in front of the administration building of the U.S. Naval Hospital at Norco, once the Lake Norconian resort. I figured it was a great, almost unknown bit of local history.



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metal sundial at the former U. S. Naval Hospital in Norco was dedicated by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt during her visit to the facility in April 1943. (Courtesy of Brigitte Jouxte)

The Lake Norconian resort was a grand hotel and resort built by Rex Clark for his new Norco townsite. Unfortunately, it opened just a few months before the onset of the Great Depression, and despite attracting celebrities and some wealthy clients, it never was much of a financial success.

In 1941, when the U. S. Navy was looking for a facility to use as a rehabilitative naval hospital, they found the old resort for sale and bought it. Ironically, the deal was finalized on Dec. 6, 1941.

The U. S. Naval Hospital at Norco took many of the badly wounded from the attack on Pearl Harbor, and continued to support the navy with medical needs for several years.

On April 26, 1943, during some of the darkest days of World War II, the commanding officer for the hospital, Capt. H. L. Jensen was alerted to the visitation of a VIP with only hours' notice. That VIP turned out to be Eleanor Roosevelt, the first lady of the United States.

Roosevelt arrived at the hospital at 10 a.m., and was greeted by Jensen and his staff. They spoke for a while about the hospital, and a luncheon was held for the guest of honor. Most of the time she was there, though, was spent in viewing the hospital, its grounds, and, most importantly, meeting and speaking with many of the patients.

Roosevelt spent about four hours at the hospital, and was amazed at the beauty of the facility and the improvements made for the care of wounded naval personnel.

So what was the gift Roosevelt had for the hospital?

It was a simple but beautiful sundial installed at the administration building during the visit. Virgil Stanbaugh, the commissary chief of the hospital of the time, told the story of Roosevelt's dedication of the sundial. He helped to install the sundial on a pedestal where it was readily visible and in full sun.

Today, a state prison, slated to [close later this year](#), is on the grounds of the former Lake Norconian resort and naval hospital. With that closure, it is hoped that the building and its many artifacts, such as the Eleanor Roosevelt sundial, can again be viewed and enjoyed for generations to come.