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They demand fresh air

Locals to be honored for environmental activism.

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Three local activists and a state senator brought more than a breath of fresh air in clean-air environmentalism. The California League of Conservation Voters a nonpartisan group dedicated to environmental issues will honor Sen. Alan Lowenthal and three others in the 5th Annual Sacramento Environmental Leadership Awards for their work in protecting and improving the health of communities surrounding the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The Aug. 31 ceremony will acknowledge the efforts of Long Beach doctor Elisa Nicholas, Wilmington activist Jesse Marquez and Noel Park, president of the San Pedro and Peninsula Homeowners Coalition, a group that helped win one of the state's largest environmental settlements.

"We know Sen. Lowenthal well," said Rachel Averback, Conservation Voters' development director. "We respect his work and believe in what he's done in Sacramento. The other nominees are approved by the board and the three nominees came approved by Lowenthal himself."

Lowenthal whose 27th District covers Long Beach, Signal Hill, Lakewood, Cerritos, Artesia, Bellflower, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens and Paramount has authored and pushed for bills that reduce diesel emissions at the ports and require them to cover open petroleum coke piles. When he was a member of the state Assembly, the Long Beach resident secured money to help reduce pollution in area beaches.

His work led him to cross paths with Nicholas, Marquez and Park.

Nicholas, a pediatrician, serves as project director for the Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma, a coalition of school districts, parents, teachers, health experts and activists. She also helped build up The Children's Clinic, Serving Children and Their Families, community clinics that offer 41,000 visits to the city.

Park is a member of the Port of Los Angeles Community Advisory Committee (PCAC), a panel comprised of residents created in 2002 with the intent of advising the port on policy issues. As part of the Homeowners Coalition, he was a part of a grass-roots campaign that brought attention to the health hazards of diesel exhaust.

Marquez's first foray into activism began with a sound wall intended to separate a Wilmington neighborhood from what his community group later discovered to be a six-lane diesel truck highway. Founder of the Coalition for a Safe Environment, his achievements include winning a successful four-year battle that gained back 96 acres of Wilmington waterfront land from the Port of Los Angeles; banding with San Pedro residents to shut down Kinder Morgan's pollution-heavy fuel storage facility; and most recently writing the first Port Communities Bill of Rights, which was presented to the United Nations' International Maritime Organization.

"Jesse really represents the emerging strength and awareness of the importance of environmental justice issues," Lowenthal said. "Frequently the community with the least economic strength ... they're the ones with greatly impacted by many kinds of pollution, whether it's air or water pollution."