



AAPA Lighthouse Award Project Highlight Annual Drone Show Event



Port of Redwood City
675 Seaport Blvd., Redwood City, CA 94063

Project Overview

Annual Drone Show Event

Award Category: Excellence in Community/Educational Outreach

Completion Date: 5/10/2025 (annual event)

Description: Launched in 2023, the Port's annual drone show has quickly evolved into a signature event for Silicon Valley. It transforms the waterfront into an immersive community experience – uniting thousands of attendees through a fusion of technology, culture and place. Each year, the show features

hundreds of synchronized drones forming themed animations above the waterfront, complemented by live music, local food vendors and interactive activities for families. More than just a spectacle, the event celebrates the Port's maritime identity while building shared civic pride. With sponsorship support from CEMEX, Graniterock, and SIMS Metal, production by Open Sky Productions and event coordination by Messenger Events, the drone show reflects a forward-thinking approach to public outreach.

Inspiration

The Port of Redwood City was determined to continue demonstrating the potential dual-purpose of its waterfront space — a place where ships come to work and people come to play. The integration of Port assets – open space, shoreline access and infrastructure – allows the show to seamlessly blend operational identity with civic experience. In doing so, it anchors the Port in the cultural geography of Silicon Valley, not just its economic one.

Challenges

The drone show was developed through a modular format, allowing year-to-year evolution. This presented challenges in identifying themes, vendors and activities to meet emerging community interests and technological advancements each year. This challenged the Port to answer this: How can we inspire community members to return to the annual event while simultaneously investing in our maritime heritage and community-driven space?

Welcoming and acting on community input was a key strategy to resolving these challenges. After the 2024 event, attendee feedback led to an expansion of food options and restrooms for 2025. Stakeholders from the County of San Mateo, civic leaders and Port Commissioners voiced public support, reinforcing the event's regional value.

Lessons Learned

Events like an annual drone show offered several learning lessons for the Port of Redwood City that can be applied to other Port activities that broaden its impact. Our Port recognizes its role beyond maritime commerce and global trade and encourages other Ports to follow suit. While we remain a vital economic engine in the global supply chain, we are also positioned to enhance quality of life and create shared experiences that strengthen community bonds.

The drone show proved that when a port reimagines its waterfront as a civic and cultural space, it creates new ways to connect with the public. By offering an event that was inclusive, sustainable and family-friendly, the Port established itself not only as a trading hub but as a trusted community partner. For example, using drones instead of fireworks created a safer, more sustainable celebration that reflected Silicon Valley's identity, while reducing environmental impacts.

There's a clear lesson: investing in community value delivers lasting impacts. The drone show positioned the Port as more than infrastructure; it's a place of pride, joy and belonging.

Value

The Port of Redwood City's drone show redefines what it means to be a modern port. Launched with purpose and vision, the event now stands as a regional model for how ports can integrate commerce with community and industry with innovation. Each year, the event has grown significantly in both size and impact since its launch in 2023.

More than a light show, it is a unifying civic experience, offering moments of wonder while affirming the Port's evolving identity. It reflects what makes the region special: technological innovation, environmental leadership and inclusive community values.

Quotes

"Serving as an economic engine for the region, the Port never loses sight of its broader relevance to the community by offering fun, spirited and diverse public events on its waterfront, like the annual drone show. The annual theme is unique but always has elements that pay homage to the Port's maritime significance and history. Every year, it is a great way to kick off summer fun with family and friends."

— Lisa Gauthier, the district 4 supervisor for the County of San Mateo

"Kicking off the summer each year, the Port's annual drone show has become a community favorite by offering a vibrant waterfront setting to enjoy an evening of food, fun, live music and lighted drones. Adults and kids of all ages delight in the unique shapes and characters that illuminate the evening sky. The Port continues to raise the bar for all that we have to offer the public along our beautiful waterfront."

— Stan Maupin, Port commissioner chair

Additional Information

Looking ahead, the Port is committed to growing the drone show's impact – welcoming feedback, exploring new themes and deepening partnerships. As it continues to expand, the drone show will not only celebrate summer, but will celebrate what's possible when a port invests in its people, its place and its potential.

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Resources

Drone show reel – [link here](#)

Social media graphics – [link here](#)

News release – [link here](#)