

# NGƯỜI VIỆT 2 NEWS

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## More on the O.C. Human Relations Commission

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Rusty Kennedy, 58, has been working for the Orange County Human Relations Commission for nearly 35 years and currently serves as its longtime executive director.

As a man who still lives in the same house he grew up in as a child, Kennedy is well-aware of the issues that have been plaguing Orange County since the 1970s.

In an interview with *Nguoi Viet 2*, he provided some insight into the evolving nature of the group's work.

**Q:** What is the purpose of the Orange County Human Relations Commission and why was it formed?

**A:** The Orange County Human Relations Commission is an organization created by the County Board of

Supervisors in 1971, and the purpose was to eliminate prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, and to try to build mutual understanding among Orange County's diverse populations.



Rusty Kennedy. Photo courtesy of [www.fullertonsfuture.org](http://www.fullertonsfuture.org)

**Q:** Was there a problem already existing within Orange County that prompted its creation?

**A:** The commission was created with the sense that in employment, housing, education, police-community relations and health care, there were disparities with issues of discrimination and that we, as a volunteer panel, diversely represented the community and could make a difference in the county.

**Q:** Why was there discrimination in O.C. back then?

**A:** Truthfully, Orange County was created in large measure from "white flight" from the inner city of Los Angeles. People in the 50s were moving to the suburbs where they could live in a

more white, affluent, less inner-city type of environment. So housing discrimination and discrimination in employment were enormous here. There was a real sense of not being welcome, particularly for African Americans.

**Q:** Have you seen changes over the years in terms of improvement?

**A:** Yeah, dramatic improvement. Today, I don't think you could get a fourth of the people in Orange County that would say that it was legitimate for a landlord or a person to discriminate against someone in the rental of housing based on their race or religion or whatever. I think we still have that kind of discrimination. It still exists, but I don't think it has the same popular support. We've seen a dramatic change in attitude.

**Q:** Have there been changes in the demographics of the area?

**A:** Demographics have changed night and day. When this commission was created in 1971, the Anglo population of Orange County was the vast majority. Today, if you look at, for example, the K-12 school

population, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade is like 33 percent Anglo so it's like two-thirds diverse ethnic community and one-third white.

**Q:** Out of all the commissions' various projects and programs, which one would you say has been the most successful and why?

**A:** I would probably say the BRIDGES effort just because of the hope for the future that it gives. I think to a certain extent, the BRIDGES program feels like it makes a difference that is lasting and goes off into the future in a significant way. We're working with young people and building attitudes that will create the kind of leaders that won't take us down that road (of divisiveness).

**Q:** What are the top issues right now that the commission is most concerned with?

**A:** Clearly, cyberbullying and basically, bullying in general — the violence that is perpetrated on someone for whatever reason it is. I think there's a significant concern that we have around that issue. The lines between public and personal are being blurred.