

# CALAVERAS SUPERVISORS STRIVE FOR TEAMWORK WITH WORKSHOP

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SAN ANDREAS - There was a lot of good, honest laughter Tuesday morning as the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors met.

Relaxed chuckles are not so common at most of the board's meetings.

But this meeting was different. For one thing, no decisions were on the agenda. And the board members did not sit facing the audience in their usual dais seats.

Instead, they were in the Sequoia Room at the Calaveras Works building, seated in a circle, spending the entire day in a "strategic workshop."

Translated, that means they were seeking to improve teamwork and boost the odds that they can actually make headway in the next 12 months on challenges ranging from a budget crunch to economic development.

The workshop facilitator, Bill Chiat, opened the meeting by noting that the problems elected leaders face fall into two categories. Some are like a broken leg and can be solved with technical methods that will allow the patient to return to his prior way of life.

But other problems are more like a heart attack and require patients to adapt to new ways of living. "There's only so much a doctor can do," Chiat said.

As if on cue, Supervisor Darren Spellman then walked in, 12 minutes late for the 9 a.m. workshop.

"Speaking of heart attacks," Chiat said, prompting guffaws from throughout the room as he shook Spellman's hand.

In the humor is a seed of truth. Spellman, who this year completes his first term, was elected in 2010 on a wave of populist discontent with the status quo. At his first board meeting, he wore hip waders to visually symbolize the odious liquid he believed he would be confronting as a public servant.

Since then, he's often harangued the board for failing to approve big-box retail development that could enhance tax revenues despite the fact that not a single such development has come before the board in that time.

Spellman, and to some extent Supervisors Cliff Edson and Debbie Ponte, who in 2012 unseated incumbents thanks to discontent among voters, represent a new era in local

government of ever-shrinking budgets and the apparent impotence of local government to address economic ills.

One of the first assignments Chiat made to the board members was to describe their first job and something that they learned from it.

Board Chairwoman Merita Callaway said she flipped hamburgers at a beach canteen in Maryland and learned to take orders from her boss.

Supervisor Chris Wright said his first job in landscaping also involved learning to take direction as well as how to appear to be working hard even when he wasn't.

Spellman, in contrast, said his first job as a newspaper carrier at age 12 taught him that people prosper economically through individual effort, not luck, and that Calaveras County leaders in years past "were drunken with the idea they could isolate themselves from the world."

By that, Spellman said, he meant that his 12-year-old self recognized that it was a lack of political will that caused economic stagnation of the sort gripping Calaveras County.

Chiat, who earlier in his career served a stint as the chief executive of Napa County, acknowledged that many California counties struggle over whether to approve chain stores.

But he also repeatedly warned supervisors that they face circumstances and decisions different from those of decades past. In particular, he advised them against pinning their hopes on the dream that a robust economic revival will solve budget problems.

"One of the things that makes this era different in California is we are not going to get back to that level again," Chiat said. "It's doing less with less."

By late Tuesday afternoon, the mood of the board was more subdued, but they'd also done a lot of work that had clarified which particular issues - the county's budget and the work required to open a new \$59 million jail nearing completion - were top priorities for board members.

Chiat noted that under California law, the board as a whole has tremendous power to achieve its goals, but that individually the members have no particular power.

"This is sacred duty," he said. "Being an elected official is not easy."

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