

## GUIDING FORCE ENDING 28 YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE

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ANGELS CAMP - Calaveras County Supervisor Tom Tryon is one of California's most experienced local officials.

Only one other currently serving county supervisor - Michael Antonovich of Los Angeles County - has been in office longer.

When Tryon leaves office at the end of this month, he will have served for seven full terms, a total of 28 years.

Such a long period of continuous elected service is a "phenomenal feat," said David Liebler, a spokesman for the California State Association of Counties, which keeps track of the terms served by county supervisors.

Tryon never expected his elected career to last so long. He never won by a landslide and his first victory, in 1984, came after a recount and was by a single vote.

His libertarian views, particularly his stated belief that drug prohibition is a failed, counter-productive policy, provoked outrage among some voters and sparked a recall attempt within months after he was first sworn in.

And many of Tryon's proudest achievements over the years, such as crafting a community plan for Murphys or installing sewers in Vallecito, sparked backlash that cost him votes in those communities, he said.

"It was hand-to-hand combat the whole time," Tryon said his decades on the board.

### Looking ahead

Tryon, 67, said he is concerned that he and so many other experienced county leaders are leaving office all about the same time.

Tryon notes that only two of the 12 elective office holders in Calaveras County - District 3 Supervisor Merita Callaway and Coroner Kevin Raggio - have been in their elected posts for more than two years.

At the same time, County Administrative Officer Jeanne Boyce is also leaving. Boyce said she chose to retire now to spend more time with family.

Tryon said the changing Board of Supervisors was a factor. "The election took out the CAO as well," Tryon said.

Tryon, who lost to Debbie Ponte of Angels Camp, is one of three departing supervisors.

District 2 Supervisor Steve Wilensky chose not to seek another term. Chris Wright won the race for that seat. In District 1, Supervisor Gary Tofanelli lost to restaurant owner Cliff Edson.

"It was a huge loss," Tryon said of Boyce's retirement.

Tryon praised Tofanelli as the current board colleague whose work he most respects.

Tryon said Tofanelli and other experienced officials will be missed as the county government completes construction of a new jail and sheriff's administration building, seeks funding to straighten the Wagon Trail portion of Highway 4 between Angels Camp and Copperopolis, and finishes both the county-wide General Plan and a community plan for Copperopolis.

"Right now the county is solvent," Tryon said. "But there is no margin of error here."

### **Voice of experience**

Tryon's advice to those who will guide the county's future: Stick by principles and make solid decisions even if they are unpopular.

The current effort to craft a community plan for Copperopolis is a great example, he said. Right now the Copperopolis area is largely a collection of separate gated communities that lacks cohesion, he said.

The danger is that a poorly done community plan could make the situation worse.

"If you just give everyone everything they want, then you will have a crappy plan and a dysfunctional community as it builds out over time," Tryon said.

Tryon said the community plan he helped craft for Murphys in the early 1980s has proven itself.

That plan solved storm flooding problems by installing new drains and rebuilding Main Street. It kept trees and sidewalks to make the town pedestrian-friendly and encouraged the downtown business district to spread south toward Highway 4, Tryon said.

Another key element: Gated housing developments were not allowed, Tryon said.

"I tell every developer, don't bring me a gated community," Tryon said. "We will all succeed or fail together."

Tryon said that not only do gates fragment communities, they can actually create hazards by limiting escape routes, as is the case with the Forest Meadows development between Murphys and Arnold.

"I always told (fellow supervisor) Merita, the shame about the Old Gulch Fire is we put it out before it burned the Forest Meadows guard shack," Tryon said. "All the communities should be integrated like Murphys."

### **Looking back**

Tryon had the right degrees for a career in high finance or high tech.

Yet somehow neither the bachelor's in economics he got from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1968 nor the master's in business administration from the University of Chicago in 1972 managed to purge his cowboy philosopher tendencies.

So when Hewlett-Packard offered the new MBA a job in Colorado, he turned it down. The reason: He wanted to be closer to the family ranch. That meant seeking work in California.

Even being in state wasn't close enough to home. After a decade of securities and banking jobs in San Francisco, Brentwood and Fresno, Tryon gave it all up and came back to live on the family ranch in Angels Camp.

In 1983, former Calaveras County Supervisor Charles Wistos persuaded Tryon to accept appointment to the Calaveras County Planning Commission.

The next year, Wistos decided not to seek another term. Tryon ran for the District 4 seat and won it, after a recount, by a single vote.

That fateful election in November 1984 launched Tryon into a 28-year career with a much lower salary and radically different demands than if he'd stayed in the business world.

"I probably would have done much better (financially) if I'd gone with Hewlett-Packard," Tryon said.

He questions, however, whether financial success in a corporate career would have translated into a good life.

"Maybe I'd be on my third wife and my kids would be druggies," Tryon said.

Also fateful was the recount that gave him his one-vote victory in 1984.

"It was just a flip of the coin," Tryon said. "If I had lost that, I would have had a whole different career path and a job somewhere else."

Now, he says he's glad the election flipped as it did.

"I'm a happy old man," Tryon said.

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## **Departing officials to be recognized**

SAN ANDREAS — Three members of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors as well as the county's top appointed official who are leaving office this month will be honored at a reception from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. Dec. 18 in the Board of Supervisors Chambers, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas.

Those leaving are Supervisors Tom Tryon, Gary Tofanelli and Steve Wilensky. County Administrative Officer Jeanne Boyce also recently announced her departure.

The public is invited to the reception, which immediately precedes the year's last regular meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

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