

# Liane Richardson

## ADMINISTRATING THE COUNTY

Liane Richardson is one of only two female county administrators in Oregon, according to Anne Marie Levis, Lane County's public information officer. Levis says Richardson was out of town and unavailable for an interview with *EW*, but she answered questions via email.

Richardson, in a document sent through Levis, writes that as a child she dreamed of different professions — doctor, veterinarian “and finally as an advocate for those who didn't have a voice.” Richardson says that in high school, “I learned what attorneys could do to help provide that voice, both [for] victims of crime and the underrepresented, and that sparked my interest in law.”

Richardson started at Lane County as an attorney before becoming acting, and then “permanent,” county administrator. In the past she has worked in the Lane County District Attorney (DA)'s office, been chief deputy district attorney in Benton County and assistant dean for student affairs at the UO School of Law — and she won Mrs. Eugene International 2007 and competed in the Mrs. Oregon International beauty pageant that year.

She writes, “During my time with the DA's office, I was named DUII prosecutor of the year and the whole experience really opened up my eyes to the limitless potential to make a difference at the county level.”

She adds, “While I've worked with the law and government in several different capacities, I feel like they've all helped prepare me for my current role and they've all helped me pursue and maintain my goal of helping those who need help.”

Richardson has been surrounded by controversy since her official appointment as county administrator in May 2011. Progressive commissioner Pete Sorenson and former commissioner Rob Handy voted against her appointment. Sorenson said at the time that he felt there should have been an open recruitment process for the position, which paid \$149,200 plus \$71,400 in other compensation.

Handy and Sorenson's no votes on her hiring were cited by Richardson in complaints later in 2011 in which she alleged that they were retaliating against her. Those complaints were determined to be unfounded by an investigator, who pointed out that voting on hiring was part of the commissioners' jobs. The investigation cost the county more than \$20,000. One of the complaints was that Handy's “body language and facial expressions” were “demonstrating retaliatory behavior toward Ms. Richardson in board meetings.” The investigator found no evidence of that in his finding of fact.

A 2006 *Corvallis Gazette Times* article said that Richardson accused a judge, whom she argued in front

of as deputy DA in Benton County, of being “disdainful” of her in court and showing it through “eye-rolling and impatient sighs.” Richardson resigned from her position, she said in the article, because of the animosity she felt the judge directed toward her.

The most recent controversies surrounding Richardson include clashing with activists when she closed down the county “free speech” plaza to protesters who were working to call attention to the plight of Eugene's homeless. Then came the proposal in January to increase her base salary to \$175,656 with a possible increase to \$221,874.

The Human Resources Department said that the salary increase was needed for “a competitive salary range to recruit and retain professional leadership skills.” Richardson tabled the compensation for a later date, after a maelstrom of protests about raising salaries during a time when the county's poor finances have led to letting criminals out of jail due to a lack of jail beds.

In December 2012, former county attorney Marc Kardell wrote in a tort-claim notice letter that he was fired after he raised concerns about misuse of county funds and that Richardson's actions were causing “a multitude of problems” within the county. Kardell also alleged possible age discrimination in his firing, a concern that has been echoed by others concerned about terminations at the county under Richardson's tenure.

Levis calls Richardson “humble,” saying she thinks people don't really know Richardson and “judge her harder as a woman.”

When asked about the controversies, Richardson responds that her position “carries with it a lot of responsibility; to the board, to young women who are looking to pursue leadership positions and of course, to the people of Lane County” and writes though “often times there are no easy answers” she tries to make decisions that represent “all groups of people equally and fairly.”

She writes that despite seeing herself as a “tom-boy” she competed in the Mrs. Oregon International Pageant “to see if in fact it was really as demeaning to women as I had thought back when I was younger” and also because she “didn't see a lot of representation from individuals with my demeanor, background and goals.” She writes that her experience didn't feel demeaning or insulting to women.

When asked where she sees herself in 10 years, Richardson responds, “Hopefully still at the county, having worked with our board, our employees and the community to bring the county back to a place where we can provide all of the services our residents need at a level that is reasonable.” — *Camilla Mortensen*



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