

Siuslaw News
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Opinion

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE
For the Siuslaw News

Mayor Joe Henry



For some jobs, there simply are no training manuals or college curricula. You just dive in and tackle multifaceted challenges with a hands-on approach.

According to Florence Mayor Joe Henry, years of business experience and even football and scuba diving all contributed to his skills in running a city. Re-elected this week to serve a second term, Henry believes the hard work of his youth also primed him for his current role.

Born in Hillsboro, Ore., Henry was still a toddler when his family moved to Washington state for his father's job in the logging industry. Henry fondly recalls growing up on a ranch baling hay and tending 200 head of cattle.

"All that shoveling and hauling prepared me for my work in government," he said with a laugh.

With a passion for sports that began at an early age, Henry attended Pacific University on a football scholarship. There, the former running back found a mentor — a chemistry teacher who inspired his interest in science.

"My goal was to be a chemistry teacher and football coach," Henry said. "Mathematics came easy and didn't involve much homework."

Math won over football and Henry graduated with a degree in business administration, which led to his career in consumer finance. After

completing a management training program, he became a branch manager for American General in Medford. The company transferred him to a supervisory position in the San Francisco area before promoting him to vice president.

American General not only spawned a successful career for Henry, but also a blossoming romance. There he met Pamela, a coworker from Wyoming, and the couple married in 1990 and raised three sons.

Henry then served as a vice president for ABCO in Denver, overseeing 110 branches in 13 states, and later in Chicago. The mortgage firm eventually promoted him to senior vice president in Orange County, Calif., where he supervised one-third of its 1,200 offices.

Then came 1999 and Y2K — and many changes for Henry. A sudden company merger "out of the blue" left him with two options: relocate to Houston or take early retirement with a substantial severance package.

"For the first time in my life, since age 10, I suddenly found myself with no job," he said. "There I was, driving out of L.A. with a huge check, no job and a questionable future."

But Henry never doubted that something better awaited him. "The congestion and cost of living were astronomical," he said. "It was time for a change."

Henry dreamed of living on the water and Pamela wanted a small town, so they searched along the West Coast for a new home. The

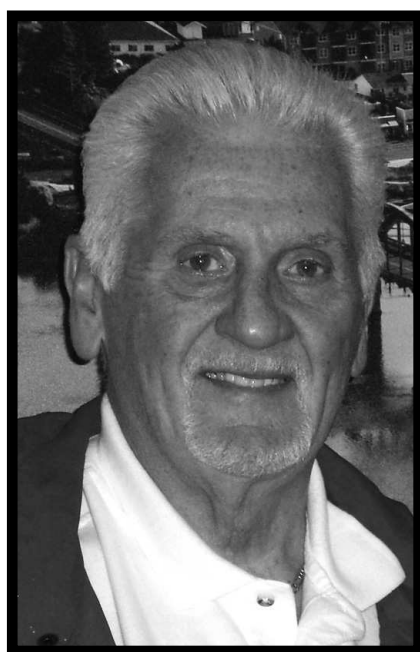


PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE

Mayor Joe Henry's vision includes expanding employment and housing while retaining the community's unique character.

couple arrived in Florence one night in December 1999 at the dawn of the New Millennium.

"We saw the lights in Old Town as we crossed the bridge and we were sold," Henry said. "We instantly knew Florence was it."

Henry, who had visited Florence during fishing trips in his twenties, felt right at home. The switch from a sunny climate to a wet one didn't dampen his outlook.

"I grew up working in the rain, playing football in the rain and fishing in the rain," he said. "I always loved it here. Florence was an awesome place then and still is — only

now it has more culture, arts and entertainment. Florence was big enough to have everything we wanted, like a good medical facility, and small enough to have none of the traffic."

The resourceful businessman launched a brokerage operation and taught scuba diving for a dive shop that he and Pam managed. Five years later, Henry turned to local government, serving two years on the city council before becoming mayor in 2014. Now, he eagerly plans his second term.

"Many residents have asked why I posted signs in an uncontested election," he said. "I wanted them to know I wasn't taking the job for granted and that I appreciate the trust they have placed in me."

Among the mayor's top priorities: education, housing, jobs and attracting new business.

"We have to provide better jobs to retain our youth and bring more young families here," Henry said. "This is what inspired me to get involved in city government, because it's critical for the growth of this community."

His vision also includes establishing a Parks and Recreation district with youth sports, soccer fields and a community recreation center.

"Soccer is near and dear to me," said Henry, whose son played the game professionally. "It can have an impact on economic development and make this community more attractive to young families. When 175 kids sign up for a previously ignored sport, our community should take notice."

The mayor's focus revolves around seniors as well as kids.

"My wife says I now belong to both groups," he said with a smile. The couple share a passion for boating, fishing and bodyboarding.

"It can get pretty scary when you go under a big wave," Henry said.

Like everything else he's done, it's a training ground for facing city challenges.

"It is imperative that we control costs in our city so those over 55 aren't forced out of their homes by rising taxes, utilities and other costs," he said. "I have great empathy for those living here on fixed incomes with rising costs. We're working hard on many facets of economic growth and starting to see results. We look forward to more positive developments."

For Henry, his role as mayor isn't about the prestige of the title but about serving the people.

"I enjoy being out and about town, interacting with people instead of dealing with bureaucracy," he said. "We have a lot of work ahead, but I'm not a quitter. We're going to see exciting changes in the coming months."

Blame it on all that hay-pitching and scuba diving.

Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning journalist, author and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. Email CJReditor@gmail.com.

LETTERS

Change our perception

In a recent letter about the Electoral College, I noted that this intended non-partisan mechanism of representative Democracy was devised by the Founding Fathers as a defense against

demagogues who would attempt to arouse popular passions in the "tumult and disorder" of campaigning directly to the electorate.

The emergence of political parties, presidential primaries and pledged Electors opened up the "tumult and disorder" of campaigning while ironically leaving the possibility that the Electoral College can "protect" against having a president chosen by direct popular vote.

That happened in 2000 when the loser, Al Gore, received more popular votes than the winner, George W. Bush. It happened again last night when the loser, Hillary Clinton, received some 200,000 votes more than the winner, Donald Trump.

The irony is that the loser of the popular vote won the Electoral College with the kind of populist, demagogic campaign the Founders feared when adopting the Electoral College.

Perhaps, in placing the Electoral College between the candidates and the people, the Founders did not foresee the transformative power the somber responsibilities of the presidency can have on the winning candidate.

Perhaps the view from Oval Office will moderate the disquieting policies and attitudes we heard from him (and his surrogates) over the course of the campaigning. Perhaps he will cause us to change our perception of the flawed campaigning persona that offends our better angels.

Perhaps. The prospects for the reality I woke to this morning are what they are. But, "hope springs eternal in the human breast."

*Arnold Buchman
Florence*

Kudos to Florence

We've all heard the expression "all politics is local." Two years ago, our local government, which includes elected officials, City Departments heads and staff heard the outcry by our constituents in regards to the proposed design for a Rhododendron Drive multi-use path.

Residents demanded that we not take federal funds previously allocated through ODOT to build the path over concerns that the original design would have widened the road bed by too much, requiring the removal of nearly all the natural vegetation along the path.

Turning down those funds would've have had consequences on future City grant applications.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. A conversation between the City, Public Works and ODOT was initiated and, through diligent efforts by our City staff, they were able to change the design and still utilize the federal money. That is a major accomplishment which doesn't happen often.

In addition, Public Works Director Mike Miller came up with compromise designs which were embraced by the community.

The fruits of those efforts are now complete. I urge you to take a look at the work along Rhododendron Drive near Greentrees. We now have a modest, permeable path providing a safe walkway. Mike was keenly aware of the pressure that we were under and saw to it that the work was done safely, efficiently and to code while maintaining natural vegetation.

The second phase of the project is currently

being engineered and will continue the path along Ninth Street to Highway 101.

These are exciting times in our community and our City Manager, department heads, City staff, Councilors and Mayor are working hard on many different fronts. Some are high profile projects, like the ReVision Florence, Economic Development projects and the Public Art Committee.

The Planning Department is also recommending ways to streamline permitting for construction as well as looking at changing land use codes and zoning.

Who would've thought that common sense in government would prevail?

We serve at your pleasure.

*Joshua Greene
Florence City Councilor*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous and anonymous letters or poetry will not be published.

All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

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