



## Wayne Lowery prepares for the retired life

By Mike Roberts | Village Life staff writer | June 15, 2010 10:29

After 20 years as general manager of the El Dorado Hills Community Services District Wayne Lowery plans to hang up his cleats. Hold those retirement party plans. He hasn't set a date more specific than "probably about September."

For the last 20 years Lowery, more than anyone else with the possible exception of Moni Gilmore, has been the face of El Dorado Hills.

The CSD's purview is limited to parks and recreation, but as the one government official that's in El Dorado Hills every day, Lowery is frequently perceived to wield much greater powers, and often called upon to address traffic, law enforcement, land use and other county government matters. He always knows who to call.

Lowery is widely known in the community, and can frequently be spotted flitting around the community park picking up litter, helping out at events and generally keeping an eye on things.

A recent interview spanned time and place, highlighting his challenges, accomplishments and favorite spots in the community he loves.

He'd just spent a couple hours with Cameron Park's recently hired CSD General Manager Fred Smith, who he'd advised, "Inheriting problems isn't such a bad thing; you get the opportunity to be the fix-it guy."

Lowery should know. He took the job in 1990 as part of a housecleaning following the installation of lights in the community park, an expensive debacle that divided the community and eventually cost all five board members and his predecessor their jobs.

Worse still, in Lowery's estimation, it deprived the community of full use of the playing fields.

### EDH roots

Lowery and his wife Cynthia moved to El Dorado Hills in 1985. She taught at Buckeye School District. He was the Fair Oaks Parks Director.

The couple moved to Mission Viejo in 1988, where he became the new city's first parks and recreation director. "A wonderful job," he reflected. "The area was exploding, and there were all kinds of park projects and recreation programs coming online."

But they both missed El Dorado Hills. When former CSD General Manager Velma Gambles retired, Cynthia asked her husband to apply for the job.

In a glaring misread of development potential Lowery replied he'd apply, but called the position a "retirement job." Growth in El Dorado Hills had plateaued at 6,000. The only big project, the community park, was just wrapping up. The CSD consisted of a couple staff maintaining a half dozen established parks.

"I figured the job was no big deal," he said. "Boy, was I wrong."

The couple's recent experience backed his conclusion. They listed their home near Jackson School in 1988 and went six months without a single offer before finally selling it for \$112,000. When they returned to El Dorado Hills in 1990 they saw their old house again on the market, but were shocked at the sticker: \$225,000.

"We were gone two years and couldn't afford our old house," said Lowery, who eventually settled with Cynthia in Fairchild Village.

### Biggest disappointment

Lowery's "retirement job" heated up immediately. The community park, bare ground when they left, was nearly complete.

Before then, the district's services had been centered in Bertelsen Park. Kids spent their summers at the pool, which offered a full aquatics program. Youth and adult softball leagues were held at what is now Jeff Mitchell Field. The gym at Brooks School was the de facto community center.

With emphasis shifting to the new community park, the residents of the also new Stonegate Village realized that a lot of hustle and bustle was arriving adjacent to their quiet streets. And when Stonegate residents realized that the sports fields were going to be illuminated, Lowery's initiation began.

"This park was in all the (Stonegate) plans, complete with lights in the athletic fields, but they must have missed that," said Lowery.

The prior board promised the community the best fields and the best lights. "Well that's what they got," said Lowery. "So my first job after I replaced the general manager who put the lights up," he said with a pregnant pause, "was to try to find a way to keep the lights up."

The first test of the lights was on a dark January night before Lowery arrived. The directional shields weren't installed yet, and no attempt was made to aim the "heads" away from the homes. The result was so bright that people in Sacramento noticed the glow in the eastward sky.

Lowery removed 40 percent of the light fixtures, he said, then made sure the directional shields were installed.

"I got a guy with a cherry picker up there after dark, and went to every house that had complained and stood in their yard with a cell phone and talked him through aiming that light until the homeowner said it was OK," he recalled.

Lowery hoped the uproar would die down, and optimistically planned a softball league under the lights that fall. Then came the elections.

In what Lowery called a “referendum on the lights,” all five standing board members were ousted. Popular Raley’s manager Dennis Ferguson didn’t even bother to run again.

The new board arrived with its own 27-point action plan. At the top of the list was the removal of the lights.

“Those lights should have stayed,” said Lowery, who called the issue his biggest disappointment in his 20-year tenure.

“Within two years every one of those five board members said taking them down was a mistake,” he said.

### Proudest accomplishment

In addition to the developers, which are obligated to provide land for parks, Lowery has garnered support from civic organizations, the business community and the schools.

Little known Sellwood Park is currently nothing more than a well manicured athletic field, accessed via a rough gravel road from Serrano Parkway, near Bass Lake Road.

It was built as a joint effort by the El Dorado Irrigation District, the Cameron Park CSD, Rescue Union School District, Serrano and the El Dorado Hills CSD at a time when there was an acute shortage of youth sports fields.

“It was a wonderful opportunity for all these agencies to pull off something they couldn’t get done on their own,” said Lowery, “something we really needed.”

It’s also the site of a future El Dorado Hills community park, and a symbol of Lowery’s strength as a general manager.

The 19-acre site will be shared with Rescue Union School District, which plans an elementary school for the site. The other half will be a community park. The sports fields, gym and playground will all be shared facilities.

“This district has been able to work with other agencies and developers to make good things happen in the community,” he said. “I have to say that I’m proud of that.”

### Hidden jewels

Lowery likes the half-acre bulb of Village Green Park east of the Serrano Visitors Center, which many residents assume is restricted to Serrano use.

Fairchild Park, right down the street from his house, also gets a “hidden jewel” nod because of its Native American grinding rocks.

### And speaking of rocks-

Lowery called the dual-boulder billboard beneath the archery range on El Dorado Hills Boulevard “an icon in the community,” and offered up “the story of the rock”

The original rock was across the street, he said, where the El Dorado Village Apartments now stand

along Olson Way.

Oak Ridge students had been painting school-based messages on the rock for years, he said. "It was their rock." Totally.

When construction on the apartments began, he worried about the Oak Ridge rock, and got permission to move it across the street.

Prior to 9-11, most rock messages had a life expectancy of one or two days. Evon Phillips' post-9-11 American flag changed that. Lowery recalled that it lasted a couple weeks before being painted over.

That didn't sit well in the community, which was still raw-nerved from the terrorist attack. With help from the fire department, Phillips repainted the flag, and Doug Veerkamp found another rock, "so that Oak Ridge could have their own," said Lowery.

Both boulders have since become community rocks.

The short list

Lowery's tour of favorite El Dorado Hills spots includes Kalithea Park, off Ridgeview at Gillette Drive. He loves it for the spectacular view and all the use it gets, especially on the Fourth of July when hundreds of residents spread out on the athletic field to take in several simultaneous area fireworks shows.

Promontory Park makes the list despite the lengthy and expensive legal battle it took to get the lights on the athletic fields. He particularly loves the spray-ground, which hosts dozens of frolicking kids at any moment during the summer months.

"The frustrating thing about the Promontory battle was how careful we were to make sure that the future homeowners knew about the lights," he said. "And still they choose to go after us."

The district won the lawsuit, the lights went on and Promontory residents have since told him that the lights aren't so bad, he said.

Unrealized potential

The one pie-in-the-sky project that Lowery would like to see his successor bring to earth is a 9-acre tennis complex on Silva Valley Parkway, immediately north of Rolling Hills Middle School.

The land was supposed to be given to the CSD by the Stonegate developer, but was inadvertently deeded to the county. Complicating matters, it was also erroneously included in the 1988 El Dorado Hills Specific Plan as open space.

The Oak Ridge tennis team currently travels to Folsom to practice, which makes the project a potential for joint use, but not before someone untangles the land-use quagmire that's had the site tied up for the last 22 years.

Lowery's departure comes at a time when the CSD management is in transition. Parks Director Kent Oakley has also announced his retirement. The Finance and Recreation director positions are also open, although retired Roseville Recreation Director Ken Bailey has been filling in temporarily.

The community of El Dorado Hills can only hope that the next management team can be as passionate and effective as the prior regime, which set the bar high before hanging up their cleats.

[mroberts@villagelife.com](mailto:mroberts@villagelife.com)

The Mountain Democrat Newspaper is published Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday by Mountain Democrat Inc.

All images and text within these cyberpages are copyrighted by the Mountain Democrat © 1360 Broadway, P.O. Box 1088, Placerville, CA 95667 (530) 622-1255 Fax (530) 622-7894

Powered by [PHPography](#)