



COUNTY OF LAKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER  
CAROL J. HUCHINGSON

# THE CAO NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018

## Leadership Profile: Jim Steele

Jim Steele's passion for Lake County runs deep.

He first came to Lake County in 1975 to join a team that was studying Clear Lake and concurrently worked with a PG&E team studying the Geysers.

In his 30 years of work for the state as a scientist and environmental expert, he has worked in all 58 counties in California. When it came time to build a home, there was no contest. "We chose to come to Lake County because it is absolutely the gem of the state," Jim stated.

He bought 70 acres here in 1995 that needed everything. In 2002 Jim Steele, who had retired from the state, moved onto the Lake County property staying in a 4 ½ foot high pop tent for three years, while he put in a well, a road, and built his 3-story home. "My wife continued living and working in San Jose during construction. Everyone asked me why I didn't move into a trailer, but I didn't want to get comfortable. I wanted to build a house." He continued, "So every day - snow, rain, it made no difference - I did something to move it along."

The tent stay and all of the hard work were well worth it. Jim eagerly shows off pictures of the unobstructed view of Clear Lake and Mount Konocti that he and his wife enjoy from their deck. "Isn't it terrible that I have to deal with this every day," he jests about the view. The scientist Jim Steele adds, "There are 21 volcanic features right outside my door!"

Lake County's environment isn't the only thing about Lake County that attracted Jim Steele. He is also impressed by Lake County's people. "You cannot find a more resilient people or a more positive people than in Lake County." Steele adds, "They may talk about negatives on one side, but they are genuinely positive about their lives here. Because, where else are you going to live, where you get what you get here? You have newer residents interwoven with peoples who have been here for 20,000 years. It's amazing."

When asked what might surprise others to learn about Jim Steele, he answers, "I never graduated high school. I went into the military, and it was the best move I ever made. The military exposed me to technology and science, and I ate it up. When I left the military I said, 'I'm going to get a PhD,' and I did."

Jim Steele is not running for a second Supervisorial term. "There is a huge fulfillment in being on the Board of Supervisors, but I'm 76 years old," he said. "My wife and I haven't taken those retirement vacations that we have been talking about for years. It's time for us to do that, while we still have the ability to do so." (Continued on next page)

### Inside This Issue

- 1 Leadership Profile: Steele
- 2 Steele, continued
- 2 CAO Notes: Community Visioning Update
- 3 Thank you from Admin
- 3 Fact or Fiction: Disaster funds
- 4, 5 Vision 2028: Reimagining Lake County
- 5-7 Know Your County  
Departments: Animal Control

---

*Steele has worked in all 58 California Counties. When it came time to build a home, there was no contest.*

---

## Leadership Profile: Steele, continued



What's next for Jim Steele after his tenure as Supervisor? "I want to stay involved with the Silver Foundation that my wife and I founded to assist Lake County senior citizens and also with the environment of Clear Lake. I hope that I can continue to do both of those things." (Cont. on next page)

Finally, when asked what he would like to see written in his newsletter profile, Jim Steele's comments turn to County staff. "The County staff are the anchor for this County. When someone works in government, they are the stability factor for the entire community. Somebody needs to go out and fix the road. Somebody needs to go out and monitor the lake. County employees do the work to bring new initiatives forward and handle the critical responsibilities that all County residents rely upon. County employees don't get the recognition that they deserve. Our County employees should be very, very proud of what they do."

## CAO Notes: Community Visioning Update

I was deeply encouraged to see many County employees among the hundreds of County residents that attended our January Community Visioning Forums. You are the driving force that enables the work of this County. You see, every day, the significant needs of members of our community, and you seek to meet them with insight and energy. Your passion will also inform the direction our County takes, moving into the future.

You may wonder what has changed since January's Forums. Here are just a few highlights:

As of April 1, Kathy Ferguson is serving as County grant writer, and she has begun meetings with Department Heads to gather grant writing needs and areas of focus. We are excited that Kathy is being trained and mentored by a long-time top Lake County grant writer, Karen MacDougall. In May, the Board of Supervisors will set priority for our grant writing needs.

We are also developing a more robust volunteer employee program, and gathering Department Head input on where and how volunteers can be used. We have heard from so many County departments that staff vacancies have increased workloads, and if volunteers can help free up County staff to do your most critical work, that will be a huge win.

There are many Economic Development and marketing initiatives in progress, as well. Dr. Robert Eyler, a renowned economist, is helping us target industries that can be sustainably successful in Lake County. The next round of Community Visioning Forums, beginning this summer, will focus upon Economic Development. County staff will partner with community leaders to promote our most promising opportunities.

Perhaps most excitingly, the Board of Supervisors recently approved Vision 2028. I encourage you to read the article on page 4 to learn more, and cannot wait to work with you to realize our Vision.

–Carol J. Huchingson

---

*I cannot wait to work  
with you to realize  
Vision 2028.*

---

## Thank you to all Department Heads and fiscal staff

This budget season, Administrative staff introduced a new approach to budgeting, encouraging departments to balance their budgets based upon a fixed General Fund contribution, referred to as "Net County Cost."

In previous years, budget submissions were often subject to broad reductions by Administrative staff. While our staff has always tried to work with departments to make the right cuts, it can be challenging. When resources are scarce, those who understand a department's business best really should make the toughest calls on priorities, and the "Net County Cost" approach seeks to allow General Fund departments to do exactly that.

The County Administrative Office wants to thank all County departmental fiscal staff for their partnership in implementing our new budgeting norm. This year's budget submissions make priorities clearer, and we fully expect General Fund dollars will be more efficiently allocated as a result.

Our aim is and has been to ensure that Lake County residents enjoy the best possible services available within our means. County employees animate this objective, and give it focus.

Thank you, fiscal staff, for your persistent efforts to ensure every County General Fund dollar is wisely invested.

## Fact or Fiction: "The County missed out on millions in disaster-related funds"

We have heard this rumor, and it could not be further from the truth. In reality, because County staff reached out to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for a proactive audit of our Valley Fire-related claiming procedures, we avoided spending millions that would not have been reimbursable.

In the aftermath of any disaster, the affected jurisdiction compiles an "Initial Disaster Estimate." These are always based upon very limited initial information, in the context of an active and ongoing disaster situation.

2015's Valley Fire was in many ways an unprecedented event for a jurisdiction of Lake County's size. Initial estimates for the scope of the County's tree debris removal program exceeded what were eligible reimbursable costs under FEMA regulations, but they were corrected before the money was expended or claimed.

Not long after the Valley Fire began, the State provided the County a \$5 million Advance, for disaster response and recovery efforts. This was always a loan. When the State asked for repayment of the Advance, some in the community thought the County had "lost" this \$5 million. Again, it was always a loan, and loans are repaid.

If you have heard a rumor, and it is concerning to you, we would appreciate the opportunity to respond as directly as possible. If you can identify the source, we will review the information firsthand. This is usually best.

We will try to respond to any concern, but without knowing the specific nature, it is difficult to discern how a misunderstanding may have come about.

---

*When resources are scarce, those who understand a department's business should make the toughest calls on priorities.*

---



## Supervisors Approve Vision 2028: Reimagining Lake County

On Tuesday, April 10, 2018, the Lake County Board of Supervisors took a powerful step toward a brighter future, conceptually approving "Vision 2028: Reimagining Lake County," a list of "Ten Key Priorities" for the next decade.

The County's Vision 2028 priority statement continues a process that began in January, when hundreds of County residents attended Community Visioning Forums, and voiced their concerns and hopes for the future.

---

*"Vision 2028 is a thoughtful approach to exactly what's happening, realistically, in our world."*

*Rob Brown,  
District 5 Supervisor*

---

"There was an overwhelming theme," shared County Administrative Officer Carol J. Huchingson, "We need to move forward in positive ways: we need to keep our residents safe; develop our infrastructure in support of vibrant communities; and take comprehensive, intelligent steps toward local Economic Development."

Huchingson described the "Vision 2028" statements as, "An overarching umbrella," from which the County will operate over the next ten years. "This is a living document, that's going to be [updated] at least annually, perhaps more often," offered Huchingson. "There will be considerable discussion over what [these priorities] actually mean, many subtasks and specific marching orders to meet [these] overarching [priorities]."

Here is the full Vision 2028 priority list:

Consider and promote the well-being and economic resilience of every Lake County resident.

Maintain a transparent County government that is responsive, efficient, effective and fair.

Continue rebuilding and all efforts to recover from our recent disasters.

Enhance Public Safety: protect our citizens and serve them well

Grow our economy and spur creation of quality local jobs:

- Focused Economic Development
- Clean up our neighborhoods through Code Enforcement
- Foster a business-friendly environment
- Pursue funding to strengthen communities
- Market Lake County as a premier California outdoor recreation destination
- Advocate for Lake County's needs through targeted political action

Improve our infrastructure:

- Roads and transportation
- Internet access for all

Support the County workforce, through targeted training, retention and recruitment initiatives.

Collaborate with Tribes, Cities and community groups to maximize opportunities.

Care for our County's defining feature: Clear Lake.

*(Continued on next page)*



## Vision 2028, continued

Invest in Lake County's richest resource: our People

- Provide pathways for our youth, leading to bright futures living in Lake County
- Encourage volunteerism, service and action toward the common good
- Recognize the wisdom and experience of Senior Citizens and serve them well

"The priorities are not in order," said Huchingson. "However, the first, 'Consider and promote the well-being and economic resilience of every Lake County resident,' serves as a crucial declaration that Lake County's government must serve the interests of all."

"Sometimes, when we're up here making decisions, we forget about the most vulnerable in our community," related District 4 Supervisor Tina Scott. "I think that's something we have to keep in the forefronts of our minds: Who is it going to hurt and who is it going to help?"

"Every decision we make is a financial decision for somebody," added District 1 Supervisor Moke Simon.

"It doesn't hurt to remind ourselves of that every time we make decisions," voiced District 5 Supervisor Rob Brown. "[Vision 2028] is a thoughtful approach to exactly what's happening, realistically, in our world. I don't [know] that 57 other counties have that."

"Every Code Enforcement issue we take care of covers a lot of this stuff, I've been preaching it for over twenty years," enthused District 2 Supervisor Jeff Smith, "I love the way [Huchingson and staff] laid this out!"

"It's been a long road getting to this point, and a lot of things have happened," commented District 3 Supervisor, Jim Steele. "I think this is a great direction."

"[We] intend to make it clear to the 64,000 [Lake County residents] that we show up to work for every day, we're here to champion the broad scope of [your] needs. We're here for you. Everything we're doing is for the betterment of your life here," emphasized Huchingson.

## Know Your County Departments: Animal Care and Control

*Positive outcomes for animals now, productive directions for the future.*

As humans, we often think of ideas as opposites. Something is either good or bad. A quick fix, or long-term goal. A win or a loss. We also want things to be clear, to have a start and end date and identifiable signposts along the way; we want to be certain we are headed in the right direction.

Animal Care and Control is not so simple. Animal Care and Control is about the long view; the decades-long effort to manage animal populations through spay and neuter initiatives is a prime example. It is also about maximizing the present moment; creating a positive outcome for one vulnerable animal that comes through the door, and is in need of a good home. Weighing these priorities can be challenging.

As an agency, Lake County Animal Care and Control could invest nearly all of their resources in animal adoptions.

"In the first nine months of this [fiscal] year, we adopted out 119 dogs," shares Director William Davidson, "But, in that same timeframe, we took in 181 owner-surrendered dogs. That's totally [out of] balance, and it doesn't even include the 520 that we took in from the streets. "We have 42 dog kennels, [for example]. We take in an average of 110 dogs a month."




---

*"We have 42 dog kennels. We take in an average of 110 dogs a month."*

*--William Davidson*

---

## Animal Care and Control, Continued

In spite of these difficult numbers, Davidson and his staff have managed to achieve a live release rate of 75%. Of all of the animals taken in by the shelter, three quarters of them are successfully placed with a caring home.

"In 2009, when I came on board, our live release rate was 39%. [Now], 75% of the animals that we take in are returned to the community alive. That's a heck of an improvement, it really is! [As recently as 2010 or 2011], we were the County with the highest euthanasia rate in the State of California."

Davidson worked with Veterinarian Richard Bachman to develop an in-house medical clinic program. "Prior to that, our medical work was being outsourced to local veterinarians. The County was allocating \$22,000. We had to carefully pick and choose which animals received care; you want to help them all."



Animal Care and Control staff do all they can for each animal. When it comes to animal adoptions, this can mean contacting multiple community organizations, including animal rescue groups up and down the state. Staff have regularly driven animals to Marin County, Sacramento, and Chico. "We go to that extra effort to try to make sure we can get them re-homed," says Davidson.

Davidson and his team go to extraordinary lengths to ensure their long-term priorities are in order, as well. Spay and neuter surgeries are high on the list.

"You think about the statistics. One male and female cat [and their offspring], in a seven-year period [can] produce almost 400,000 offspring. That's just one male and one female cat!"

"Prior to 2014, people were bringing in cats left and right. And it was the same people every year, the same [cats] who were just having litter after litter after litter of kittens." To mitigate this, "We went to the Animal Control Advisory Board, and got their approval to charge a fee to take in stray cats."

"In addition to that new fee, we started our Community Cat Program, which is free to the community. People just have to make an appointment, bring a stray cat in, and we will spay and neuter it, notch the ear, vaccinate it, and it's all at no charge to them. Then, they can either return [the cat] where they found it, they can keep it, or they can find it a new home."

Lake County Animal Care and Control now performs over 2,000 spay and neuter surgeries per year. Of these, 1,000 result from the Community Cat program. "Give us three more veterinarians, we can do surgery five days a week and still need more space... There's just a huge need."

Controlling animal populations, "It's not an overnight fix. It's a slow process that, as time goes on, you'll eventually hit that steep decline in the curve. When we're going to hit that steep decline, I don't know, but things are improving."

Davidson and his team attend to their numerous priorities, short- and long-term, with a staff of 7.75 permanent employees, about 20 part-time employees and a rotating crew of a dozen or so volunteers. "Every part-time employee that's here does an outstanding job, [they] are here because they want to be here. [Some] have been here in excess of ten years!"

The contributions of volunteers have been equally extraordinary. In 2015, in the wake of the Rocky Fire, the Lake Evacuation and Animal Protection (LEAP) program, a group highly trained to assist with disaster response, were awarded the Governor's Volunteering and Service Award for Governmental Agency of the Year.

*(Continued on the following page)*

---

*Controlling animal populations is not an overnight fix.*

---

## Animal Care and Control, Continued

"That was a tough one. The Rocky Fire hit, and for five days straight, everybody was going and going. They were working on about 2-3 hours of sleep. We removed a 300 pound tortoise from a property, some parrots... CALFIRE nominated LEAP [for the service award] because of all the incredible work volunteers and staff were doing."

In the decade since Davidson became Director, Lake County Animal Care and Control has seen transformative positive changes. What is their secret?

"One of the things that I have always done is the open door policy. Anybody that wants to talk to me, I'll talk to them. We don't hide anything. We put our statistics, good and bad, on our website. With a County that has this many animals and [a much smaller number of] kennels, we do the best we can. The staff does an outstanding job."

Staff members rise to challenges. They educate the public, applying the best available methods and demonstrating sensitivity with individuals who have cared for animals for decades, but have run into difficulty. They perform animal welfare investigations, and the clear documentation of Animal Control officers has led to multiple felony convictions in recent years.

"We are here to serve all the homeless and unwanted animals in the community."

Lake County Animal Care and Control does this and more, by realizing their long-term priorities through urgent and persistent effort, every day.

