

# Keeley ready to assume job of county supervisor

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SANTA CRUZ — Fred Keeley didn't always dream of a life in politics.

Born in Sacramento, he spent a year in a Catholic seminary and studied social science at San Jose State. After college he took a job as a financial manager for a big corporation and life on the career track seemed assured.

But as a child of the '60s and a college student of the '70s, Keeley felt obliged to be a 'part of the solution,' and became involved in local politics. For years he volunteered in political campaigns, and in 1981 County Supervisor Joe Cucchiara made him an enticing offer — a full-time job as an administrative assistant.

"I was working in the private sector, I was 30 years old ... and I had to make a decision whether to stay on track or jump at the opportunity presented by Joe," Keeley said. "I realized my real passions were in politics and public service, and that I had less passion for the work I was doing."

So despite a 50-percent pay cut and a less-than-assured future, Keeley secured the blessing of his wife, Maria, and embarked on a new career. The rest of the story is well documented.

After three years working for Cucchiara and five years as chief of staff for Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Monterey, Keeley won a resounding victory in the race for Fifth District Supervisor in June. He steps into the seat vacated by Cuc-

chiara on Jan. 3, and to some degree will assume Cucchiara's populist, progressive mantle as well.

But though he shares a close personal friendship and political alliance with Cucchiara, Keeley plans to create his own political legacy in the sprawling district which includes Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Felton, Scotts Valley and parts of Santa Cruz.

The first year or so will be largely taken up in finishing a multitude of projects begun by Cucchiara, he said. The list of nearly three dozens works-in-progress range from "the sublime to the ridiculous," Keeley joked, and include:

- Overseeing the multi-million dollar improvement to the intersection of Highway 9, Mount Hermon and Graham Hill Roads.

- Completing a project to place utility wires underground in Felton.

- Changing the system of bus stops in Boulder Creek.

- Creating a master plan for Quail Hollow Regional Park.

- Building a parking lot and amphitheater at Highland Park.

- Erecting a new firehouse for the Zayante Fire Department.

- Closing the Ben Lomond dump.

- Raising money for a swimming pool at San Lorenzo Valley High School.

- Installing a wheelchair ramp at the Felton Community Hall.

- Patching leaks in the Highland Park swimming pool.

"Some of these projects are

small, but they're very important to people here," Keeley said.

Despite the workload inherited from Cucchiara, Keeley has political goals of his own, and reforming the county Planning Department is at the top of his list. Continued crisis and inconsistency at the Planning Department has not only eroded public confidence in the government, but is eroding the county's ability to protect the environmental and manage growth, he said.

But tackling county-wide issues won't replace Keeley's style of personal politics, he vowed.

"When I was running my campaign people would ask, 'given your work on the board and in state politics, are you going to be more taken up with that than with a stop sign in Brookdale?'"

"My answer was — I have no illusions about the County Building or the Board of Supervisors, ... and I have very little interest in spending a lot of time in this building."

A resident of Boulder Creek since 1977, Keeley has established long-term contacts with the numerous citizens groups that — in the absence of city governments — shape politics in the San Lorenzo Valley.

"I've established relationships of real depth with the fire chiefs, the business associations, the Valley Women's Club ... the matrix of players participating in the life of the community," he said. "It's a comfort for me — as well as for them — that it won't take years to establish these contacts."