

# Youth movement

## De la Paz, 26, is city's youngest mayor in history

By DAVE BROOKS

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The City Council made Watsonville history Tuesday night, naming Richard de la Paz, 26, mayor. He is the youngest mayor in city history.

"Now Richard is the old man and I'm the new kid on the block," said newly appointed City Council member Dale Skillicorn.

With many pats on the back, a few tears and several long-winded speeches, the City Council said goodbye to some longtime members and welcomed two newcomers to its ranks.

The meeting marked a departure from the council's more divisive discussions on local political issues. After a nomination by council member Judy Doering-Nielsen, the council unanimously elected de la Paz.

"I'm not like most other people my age," said de la Paz. "I know I'm still young, but I can't do the same things other people in their 20s get to do. I can't go out every night and party or spend the evenings at nightclubs. I have many responsibilities."

De la Paz is the father of two daughters and has been married for four years to his 22-year old wife Michelle.

A sales representative for Graniterock construction, de la Paz speaks most proudly of his time spent in the U.S. Navy.

"I have sort of an aggressive attitude and I think that comes from my service in the military," he said. "Before that I was really involved in sports. I like intensity. When I first came on people said that I was just a kid and I want to tell them that three years later I'm still a kid. I think this can be an advantage. In fact, whenever I decide to leave my district I'm going to try and recruit a replacement who is younger than I was."

De la Paz was elected to the council in a 2000 election victory that was a surprise to everyone including himself. Upsetting Erica Padilla, who was supported by almost the entire council, the then 23-year-old pulled a surprise victory using his "back-to-the-basics" campaign strategy of knocking on doors and drumming up support by speaking one-on-one with the voters from the district.

"When I came on I didn't know anything about the City Council, only that I wanted to be on it and

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Richard de la Paz takes the oath of office for Watsonville's new mayor Tuesday evening at the City Council chambers beside Judy Doering-Nielsen who was voted in as mayor Pro Tem.

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New Watsonville City Council members Dale Skillicorn (left), and Antonio Rivas, share a light moment during a break in the City Council meeting Tuesday night.



Outgoing Watsonville Mayor Betty Bobeda joins outgoing fellow council member Chuck Carter at the podium for words of praise and thanks.

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Register-Pajaronian



# MAYOR

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represent the neighborhood where had I spent my whole life," he said. "I know the people here, I know the issues. I grew up on Elm Street, this is who I am, this is what I'm from — I am Watsonville."

The mayoral appointment wasn't the only order of business. Ramon Gomez nominated Judy Doering-Nielsen to the mayor pro-tempore position, similar to vice-mayor. After 35 years of work as a top financial officer at San Jose National Bank, Doering-Nielsen announced her retirement Tuesday and said that she plans on spending more time working for the council and enjoying time with her family.

"After 35 years of putting it off, I'm going to do all things I've said I always wanted to do," said the lively Doering-Nielsen.

Doering-Nielsen's appointment didn't go as smoothly as de la Paz's. Both Ana Ventura Phares and Antonio Rivas voted against appointing Doering-Nielsen to the number-two job. "I disagree with her stances on labor and affordable housing," explained Rivas.

Rivas and Skillicorn joined the council's ranks last night as its two newly-elected members. The two replaced outgoing Mayor Betty Bobeda and council member Chuck Carter.

In his typical self-deprecating form, Chuck Carter thanked the



**Watsonville City Clerk Lorraine Washington (right) delivers the oath of office to city council members (from left) Dale Skillicorn, Antonio Rivas, Ramon Gomez and Ana Ventura Phares.**

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

crowd and told City Manager Carlos Palacios, "Thanks for putting up with my many stupid questions."

Carter said that being married to Mayor Bobeda's niece proved that politics made for strange bedfellows. "Betty and Judy would gang up on me at the meetings and then I would come home and my wife, who had been watching the whole thing on TV, would pick up

right where they left off."

Many people came to speak about Carter and Bobeda and what they felt was their exemplary service to the community. Carter thanked the many people who came to support him and ended by saying, "My wife said that my only duty tonight is to depart gracefully."

Mayor Bobeda delivered a tearful speech where she spoke proud-

ly of her 12 and a half years of service to Watsonville.

"When people pass through our town, I know that they can enjoy something I was a part of. I'm proud to be affiliated with Watsonville, truly a city of character."

Bobeda said that she now plans on taking a computer class and learning how to use a word processor so that she can type out her speeches.