

Bruce McPherson comes full circle

New supervisor's path leads back home

By JASON HOPPIN

jhoppin@santacruzsentinel.com

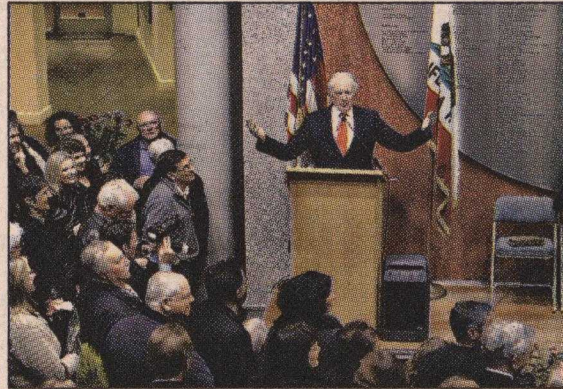
SANTA CRUZ — Saturday, Bruce McPherson repeated a ritual that's old hat for him: He raised his hand and swore an oath accompanying public office.

The ceremony was held at the Museum of Art & History, in a downtown Santa Cruz building the bears his family name. At 68, having served more than a

decade in the state legislature and as California secretary of state, McPherson is now closer the people he represents that ever before — he is a county supervisor.

"I am totally excited," McPherson, 68, said recently. "I know people say, 'You were statewide officer or a state senator.' I'm excited as I've ever been. It's that

SEE OATH ON C3



Bruce McPherson is surrounded by a sea of supporters at the Museum of Art & History in Santa Cruz on Saturday night after he is sworn in as a county supervisor.

KEVIN JOHNSON/
SENTINEL

OATH

Continued from C1

much more exciting to represent my home county more directly in an elected office."

McPherson took the oath Saturday with gratitude to those who'd helped the campaign and typical self-deprecating humor.

"I was sworn in tonight," he told a packed house. "Tomorrow I may be sworn at."

A fourth-generation Santa Cruzan, McPherson has led a celebrated career. He began as a reporter at his family newspaper, the Sentinel, later rising to editor. He was sworn in as a member of the Assembly in 1993 and as a state senator in 1996. Tragedy struck in 2001, when son Hunter was slain during San Francisco street robbery. But McPherson kept on.

Then a lifelong Republican, McPherson lost a 2002 bid for lieutenant governor. He was nominated and confirmed to replace Kevin Shelley as secretary of state in 2005, losing the following year's election. With his party's statewide significance in decline, and after failing to lock down more than half the vote in last June's supervisorial primary, McPherson dropped his party affiliation.

He comes into office with challenges ahead. He last held office five years ago, but maintained a statewide profile through policy groups such as California Forward, where he served with current Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and the man who swore him in Saturday night, county



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Surrounded by family members and supporters, Bruce McPherson places a hand on his family Bible as he is sworn in as a Santa Cruz County Supervisor at the Museum of Art & History in Santa Cruz on Saturday.

Treasurer Fred Keeley.

That profile did not guarantee him a win. He narrowly beat Eric Hammer, a son of the San Lorenzo Valley, in an achingly close election that divided the county's Fifth District. McPherson has since said he intends to focus on that area, which is less affluent than the rest of the district.

"I'm really excited to start the game and do what I can. An important part of that is we're just going to have to work with everyone. Money's scarce, the county has fewer employees than it had a few years ago," McPherson said. "I think there's a lot of cooperation and coordination that needs to be done among the Board [of Supervisors] and among the cities as well. I'm looking forward to seeing that happen."

McPherson's presence also raises the profile of the Board. Along with former Democratic state lawmakers Joe Simitian, in Santa

Clara County, and Simon Salinas, in Monterey County, McPherson is part of a unique trend of officials with statewide experience returning to local office. Across California, nine former lawmakers now serve as county supervisors.

"It's not like he's going back into politics," said his wife, Mary McPherson. "He's just continuing his public service here at home."

He has already been solicited to serve with the main statewide lobbying group for counties, the California State Association of Counties. That group is drawing on the former lawmakers experience to shape policy in Sacramento.

"These people have years of experience in various policy issues, and they also understand the politics of the Capitol and how to get things done. The relationships they have, the people they know allow them to help shape state policies in a positive

manner," said CSAC president David Finigan, a Del Norte County supervisor.

Through the campaign, McPherson stressed that he could ply his Sacramento connections to benefit his home county.

"I can't think of a person who has held the office of as state senator and secretary of state other than Bruce, so he takes a wider, deeper base as supervisor in being able to assist counties through the state," Keeley said. "He will be very, very helpful for the county of Santa Cruz in particular as it has individual issues that it wants to raise."

There are several local issues on McPherson's plate already, including a dispute between summit-area neighbors and a local gun club, the persistent issue of road conditions in the district and a potential merger between the Lompico County Water District and the San Lorenzo Valley Water District.

"I think, to merge, it would be beneficial to everyone involved," McPherson said. "Particularly Lompico."

And since counties help implement state programs, the upcoming legislative session could prove eventful as well. From health care changes through the Affordable Care Act to potential new redevelopment programs to a possible overhaul of the state's tough environmental laws, local governments are keeping one eye on Sacramento.

"I'm just anxious," McPherson said. "And there are some things that need to be addressed right away."

Follow Sentinel reporter Jason Hoppin on Twitter at [Twitter.com/schnewsdude](https://twitter.com/schnewsdude)