

SINCE 1989

SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARY
Santa Cruz, CA

SUSAN MAURIELLO LEAVES A LEGACY



PHOTOS BY DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello, who took that job two weeks before the 1989 earthquake, retires after 27 years as the county administrative officer.

Bio-m
Undaunted by challenges, she's worked behind the scenes to serve county residents

By Jondi Gumz

jgumz@santacruzsentinel.com
@jondigumz on Twitter

SANTA CRUZ » Smart, practical, knowledgeable, solutions-oriented, creative, tenacious, consensus-builder, open to good ideas — that's how people describe Susan Mauriello, Santa Cruz County's administrative officer since 1989.

You rarely see her name in the headlines.

She works behind the scenes, serving 130,000 people in the unincorporated areas, essentially the largest city in the county.

"I saw it as a calling," she said.

Mauriello, 62, who has the

mindset of a social worker, came to Santa Cruz County from New York and carpooled at night to earn a law degree at Santa Clara University.

For nearly 28 years, she's overseen big budgets — this year more than \$700 million — dealt with changes ordered by state and federal leaders and responded to disasters and economic slumps.

Her longevity is unmatched in California.

"Susan was and is the longest currently serving county administrative officer," according to Gregg Fishman of the California State Association of Counties.

Her career — 37 years with



Retiring County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello talks with her successor, Carlos Palacios, as Palacios' 19-year-old son Marco looks on.

Santa Cruz County — will end July 7 when her depth of knowledge and vast institutional

memory will no longer be down the hall.

LEGACY » PAGE 5

Legacy

FROM PAGE 1

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors will honor her Tuesday.

State issues

During her tenure, Mauriello helped counties strategize on state reforms on mental health, welfare and prisons that led to more county responsibilities and usually not enough funding.

In 1984, as the county welfare director, Mauriello worked with then-State Sen. Henry Mello to secure state money for a three-year pilot project to evaluate whether care at home was a cost-effective alternative to a nursing home for people 65 and older. The results: It was cost-effective and became a national model.

In January, the governor proposed to shift to the 58 counties the program \$630 million cost, "a pretty dire situation," said Keith Carson, president of the California Association of Counties, crediting Mauriello with crafting an argument that gave counties "relief for the next two years."

Mauriello "sat across the table from the state Department of Finance and our team to try to mitigate that cost shift," said DeAnn Baker, the association's deputy executive director for legislative affairs.

The state agreed to provide \$400 million in the coming year and to reimburse counties "in real time" instead of two years in arrears, Baker said.

Cecilia Espinola, who spent 30 years with the county and retired in December after 19 years as human services chief, remembered how Mauriello took the helm two weeks before the 1989 earthquake and provided "very strong

leadership" at a tumultuous time.

In those days before laptops and cellphones, Mauriello worked with Republican aide Jim Brulte to prep for a visit by President George H.W. Bush, walking down Pacific Avenue to see the devastation first-hand.

Social justice

Fernando Giraldo, county probation chief since 2013, calls Mauriello "a true champion of social justice."

After AB 109 became law in 2011, transferring responsibility for newly-convicted nonviolent offenders to counties to reduce prison crowding and costs, Mauriello chaired a state corrections committee and worked on a formula for allocating funds.

"She thought there should be a part that benefitted pre-trial diversion," said John Leopold, who chairs the Board of Supervisors. "It helps counties like ours get more funding."

In Santa Cruz County, probation officers were already supervising some nonviolent offenders as an alternative to jail and to deter criminal behavior.

"We're having better results," said Giraldo, noting last year 93 percent of probationers were not charged with a new offense while on supervision.

He said Mauriello expects her staff to be fully prepared.

"She's going to push back on you," he said. "You know right away where she's headed. You need to know what you're talking about or she would call you out."

My people

Giang Nguyen, county Health Services Agency director since 2011, came to Santa Cruz because of Mauriello.

With Mauriello's direction, Nguyen launched a



JONDI GUMZ — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Retiring Santa Cruz County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello, holding flowers, is encircled by county staff for a farewell photo, with health services chief Giang Nguyen and her successor Carlos Palacios next to her.

"There are not many communities where the average nonprofit can call and sit down for a meeting with the county administrative officer."

— Karen Delaney, who heads the Human Care Alliance

program of medical care for low-income residents in 2012 — before the Affordable Care Act took effect — partnering with nonprofits such as the Central California Alliance for Health. The program was fully enrolled.

Mauriello brought empathy to her role as well as expertise.

"You talk about difficult cases," Nguyen said. "She would say, 'These are my people, please help them.'"

When Nguyen wanted to add 100 slots to the MOST program, providing wrap-around services to keep people with mental illness out of jail, Mauriello suggested she scale back the expansion to 35 slots.

"It makes sense, given

the money situation," Nguyen said.

She said she learned from Mauriello "the Santa Cruz way" — slow down, look at all the angles and bring people together before moving forward.

Redevelopment

When the State Legislature abolished redevelopment agencies in 2011, Mauriello's approach was different from her counterparts.

She recommended the county work from a list of \$600 million in projects supported by the community and find partners into order to hold onto \$75 million to make improvements.

"That was a very smart strategy," said Leopold,

crediting Mauriello's understanding of how the state works. "We were the only agency that didn't have to return any money. We didn't get dinged by the state finance department. As a result, we have all these great projects."

He ticked them off: The sheriff's public safety center, Heart of Soquel Park, Twin Lakes Beachfront, Arana Gulch bike path, East Cliff walking path, Soquel Linear Park, Felt Street Park and the Live Oak Boys & Girls Club.

Negotiation

Mauriello is not one to shy away from contentious situations.

"She knows how to come to an agreement," said

Matt Nathanson, a public health nurse with the county 19 years and regional vice president of Service Employees International Union Local 521, which represents the most county workers.

He described Mauriello as a "respectful adversary," adding, "Often we are working in collaboration to bring resources into the community."

When the Affordable Care Act passed, the union and county worked together; the county added staff to sign up newly eligible people for Medi-Cal health benefits.

When the economy crashed, "we had to work together," Nathanson said, with the union accepting furloughs and smaller paychecks to save jobs.

In September, SEIU Local 21 inked a contract that runs four years.

"When we feel like the contract is reasonably good, we go longer," Nathanson said. "We wanted predictability for members."

Collaboration

Karen Delaney, who heads the Human Care Alliance, said Mauriello built a close partnership with nonprofits helping those at the margin of society.

"There are not many communities where the average nonprofit can call and sit down for a meeting with the county administrative officer," Delaney said. "Good ideas can come to the table."

This, she said, allows the county "to have more hands on solving problems" from criminal justice to social services, parks and recreation to environmental education.

"People forget that she started her career as a social worker," Delaney said of Mauriello. "I think, at heart, she is still a social worker."