

# New D.A. prepares to take office today

District Attorney

1-3-07

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SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

soon-to-be District Attorney Bob Lee was racing around with a bad cold and an empty stomach on Thursday, a day before his scheduled swearing-in ceremony.

The county's newly minted top prosecutor dragged himself to work to help with the office's transition. At 4 p.m. he looked like he was going to keel over.

"Could you excuse me?" Lee said to a visitor. "I have to grab lunch."

It was that kind of day.

We had two attorneys here from Redding who are seeking employment, and what did I have to eat?" he said. "A protein shake, and now I've had a Diet Dr Pepper. Not good health food."

Lee, 45, may be abusing his health this week, but he said he's been happy to see the office working together "to make the transition as smooth as possible."

The office wants the reputation of being professional, and I think it is," he said, noting that every position is crucial to building a team. "We've been working on this transition for six months. We've already done dozens of interviews from secretaries all the way to assistant prosecutors. You've got to remember, I used to

be a law clerk here."

In the March race for district attorney, Lee defeated his boss, incumbent Kate Canlis, by a narrow margin.

Lee reached out to progressives and middle-of-the-road county residents. He was endorsed by former Santa Cruz mayors Christopher Krohn and Katherine Beiers. He also had the support of the Santa Cruz County Deputy Sheriff's Association and the county Sheriff's Correctional Officers Association.

Lee said four assistant district attorneys, all from the Canlis management team, have given notice and will be replaced. He said he did not encourage them to leave.

As for other changes he might make, "People won't learn what happens in the D.A.'s Office from reading the newspaper. I won't make that same mistake. When there are decisions that will be made, it will be people in my office (to know) first, I think you can understand that."

Lee said he will not make personnel changes based on issues of loyalty to him or his predecessor. He said that would be "very short-

sighted policy. There won't be an A team and a B team or giving people jobs because they were loyal to me or loyal to her. We will put the right people in the right positions based on merit. I am not one to play favorites."

Asked how he got along with Canlis during the transition, he said, "You know, the D.A. is more than Bob Lee and Kate Canlis. We have extremely dedicated attorneys, inspectors and advocates. They want to do the right thing no matter who the D.A. is. These people are working for the community. Whether Kate and I have always communicated, we haven't of course. We ran in an election against each other."

Canlis could not be reached to comment Thursday.

Unlike Canlis, known to take on some major cases herself, Lee said he'd prefer to take an administrative role, helping others realize their full potential.

"Successful people are happy people," he said, "And that takes care of the morale issue. In every office, there is a morale issue."

The Canlis vs. Lee campaign was bruising. Two years earlier, Canlis defeated Ruiz after running a relentless campaign, accusing Ruiz of mismanagement and alleging he helped bungle a case that led to a women's murder, a charge Ruiz called despicable and untrue. Ruiz

finished second to Canlis in the primary and lost in the general election.

But the latest election had Canlis on the defensive with Lee taking more aggressive stances, accusing Canlis of poor job performance, especially in an ad saying she had bad jury-trial conviction rates.

"I don't know if I was aggressive or not," Lee said. "We felt fairly strongly there needed to be a change."

Lee said he's ready for the position because he worked his way up from the bottom.

"I'll tell you, when I was in the District Attorney's Office in Monterey County, I wasn't very good. I started getting gun shy about doing what I was paid to do. But after I messed up a case, a judge called me in to talk. Instead of upbraiding me, he said, 'I want you to make mistakes. But learn from them.'"

"I've watched everyone from (former D.A.) Art Danner, Ron Ruiz, Kate Canlis and (Assistant D.A.) Christine McGuire, and I've always tried to learn, both from their positive things and their mistakes," Lee said.

Lee will have two swearing-in ceremonies today — at the Watsonville Courthouse at 2 p.m. and at the Santa Cruz Courthouse at 4 p.m.

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