



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Brian Foss will retire Sunday as the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor's port director.

# Port director to retire after 35 years

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The year after Brian Foss took his job as head of the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor, the port expanded and made room for 500 more boats.

About 15 years after that, Foss lead the effort to rebuild after harbor buildings crumbled in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. Along the way, he's dealt harbor dredging, odd smells and the harbor's \$4 million budget.

On Sunday, the man at the helm of the Santa Cruz harbor — who served as harbor master for three years and port director for 32 — will step down after 35 years. This week, friends and fellow staff said they hated to see him go.

"One minute Brian is patiently

listening to complaints, the next minute he is jumping into the water to fix a broken dredge pipe. He is the heart and soul of the harbor and will be missed," said Dan Haifley, executive director of O'Neill Sea Odyssey.

Foss came on board in 1973, after serving seven years in the U.S. Coast guard following his graduation from University of Southern California. A year after his arrival, Foss oversaw the construction of the upper harbor, which transformed the harbor into a 1,200-slip port.

In 1989, Foss led the \$6.6 million effort to rebuild after the earthquake. Construction was finished in less than five years.

Foss also has dealt with the thousands of anchovies that at one point were dying regularly in the harbor, and with neigh-

bors furious over the harbor's dredging, among many other issues.

The dead fish emitted a foul stench and turned the water so acidic that boat owners were forced to repaint, said Ron Merrill, chairman of the Port Commission, which oversees the harbor's activities.

Dredging, which sucks sand from the harbor entrance and dumps it on nearby beaches to allow boats to pass through, also emitted a smell that drove nearby residents nuts.

Merrill said he admired the way Foss attacked and stuck with both issues until he figured out how to solve them.

"He's affable, approachable, but he also has pursuit," Merrill said. "If there's a problem, he'll pursue it until there's a satisfactory conclusion."

Rick Smith, who has worked for the harbor for 25 years, will take Foss's place as port director.

Foss won't be going too far, though; the harbor has hired him back part time as director of planning and government relations.

Foss said he is looking forward to more time spent writing, paddle boarding, cycling and traveling.

"Thirty-five years is enough," Foss said. He knew for sure that it was time to leave when "my rubber tree plant that's been with me for 25 years, it died," Foss said.

In his honor, the Santa Cruz City Council has named June 1 "Brian Foss Day."

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