

Neal D. Smith

Whenever in war or other national emergency, the government of our republic requires extraordinary capabilities in the men who on short notice have to accomplish the most difficult non-routine tasks, it goes beyond the ranks of its own employees and calls upon the leaders of private industry, business, and professions.

It probably is the supreme compliment to Santa Cruz' first city manager, Neal D. Smith, that a huge industrial corporation, with all its tremendous resources in private capital and its unlimited source of personnel reversed that procedure and reached into municipal government to obtain his services.

This unsolicited offer, including a remuneration far in excess of anything that municipal government generally and our local government certainly is able to offer, speaks more for Smith's ability and experience than any one of his many friends and admirers are able to express, and are an argument that none of his detractors can demolish. The only other argument coming close is the record of his local accomplishments.

We find that record impressive. Councilman Sam C. McNeely, who as first mayor under the new charter was among those primarily responsible for hiring Smith in 1948, made a good point last night when he said that in his three and one half years as city manager, Smith did far more than the average citizen is able to realize, but that it will be felt in community progress for a long time to come.

Neal Smith came to Santa Cruz as more than a mere administrator. He was the first city manager under a form of government just established. It was up to him to make it work, and that he succeeded, and succeeded admirably, is beyond doubt or question.

Another former mayor, George N. Penniman, provided the clue to the degree of success last night when he recounted the vivid interest with which the progress of the Santa Cruz municipal government under the new charter has been followed by students of government not only in California but throughout the West. This is supplemented by the fact that Smith, in direct recognition of his ability, was elected president of the city manager's section of the League of California Cities, and that Governor Earl Warren picked him to head the regional water pollution control board.

Neal Smith is a professional engineer, and in a way, it was the engineer's approach which he used to tackle the task which confronted him. He lacked the color and flamboyance that sometimes goes with executives. Instead, he chose to build the structure of sound city government with the methodical persistence and meticulous plodding of the engineer. He is a tremendously hard worker, and his job meant far more to him than an occupation to provide a living. He planned the structure, and he supervised its construction with the fascination and pride of the engineer. Today, our city government rests on solid foundations that cannot lightly be shaken. Neal Smith poured them.

The true significance of Smith's achievement here will only gradually emerge during the next months and years. When he leaves, the council-manager form of government in Santa Cruz is weaned. The present council, still pretty much the original team that started the job with Smith, will have to find a new city manager, and while the new man certainly will handle his job in his own way, he will also find that he is dealing with a council that has learned much during the past few years, and will constitute a tough and demanding legislative branch.

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City government in Santa Cruz, in spite of all obstacles, is now a well-functioning, efficient institution. It is operating under the ever more watchful eye of the public for whose sole benefit it exists. It has shown constant improvement, and the way to further needed improvement lies open. Much remains to be done, but it shall be recognized that more than expected was accomplished in the past three years. Neal Smith, as responsible executive, can justly claim a considerable share of the credit.

Having followed the development of the city government from day to day, we regret to see Smith leave at this time. He faced a tough job here, and he handled it conscientiously and well. Our good wishes accompany him to the new tasks which await him.
