

SC Chamber hires new CEO

Chamber of Commerce

By STEVE PEREZ
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SANTA CRUZ — A veteran business booster from Alameda County has been hired as CEO of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce.

Donald D. Winn Jr., 45, executive director of the Newark Chamber of Commerce since 1989, has accepted an offer to lead local business efforts.

In a telephone interview with the Sentinel Wednesday, Winn sounded enthusiastic.

"I love to work," he said. "Probably one of my downfalls is that I've never learned how to say no. I jump into a job wholeheartedly and am really looking forward to getting my feet wet."

Winn is scheduled to start Oct. 16, chamber president Michael Sarka said.

Winn will serve at the pleasure of the board of directors of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce.

His salary was not released, but when the position was advertised, the

base pay was set at around \$45,000.

He will supervise a staff of three full-timers in Santa Cruz. The local Chamber has about 900 members and an annual budget of \$300,000.

Winn, a resident of Hayward, supervised a staff of three in Newark, a city of 40,000 which he described as a "mid-scale bedroom community" near Fremont.

He is a 1994 graduate of the Institute for Organization Management at Stanford University, and has a bachelor's degree in behavioral science from Cal Poly Pomona. He also attended Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

"I love that town," he said. "And I get a similar feeling when I go into Santa Cruz."

"There's a community feeling there. What I'm really looking forward to is the fact that the people who own businesses and who work there also live there."

In Newark, he observed, more than 50 percent of the chamber's members live elsewhere.

"There's a whole different dynamic than when you actually live there," he said.

Winn, selected from a field of more than 30 candidates, takes over a post filled in an interim capacity by Melissa McClaren-Lighty since April. The previous CEO, Dan Ehrler, left Santa Cruz for a similar job in Santa Monica.

Jeff Payne, senior vice president of Comerica Bank in Santa Cruz, chaired the task force that recommended Winn to the chamber's board of directors.

Payne said finalists were interviewed for two hours. Winn has a reputation for being an "excellent communicator" with staff, city officials and members of the business community.

"The comments from people we talked to were pretty consistent," Payne said. "He works well with people and that became apparent in our conversations with him."

Payne also cited Winn's extensive experience as a chamber executive, where he earned high marks for increasing the membership and developing a close working relationship with city officials.

Winn's resume also lists a five-year stint as administrative assistant for California-Nevada-Hawaii District of Kiwanis International, where he organized conferences and regional meet-

ings for up to 1,800 participants.

From 1981 to 1984, he was self-employed in the field of management services, and was a marketing assistant and youth expo coordinator for the Orange County Fair and Exposition Center from 1979 to 1981.

He served as president of the Chamber Executives Association of Alameda County and on the Alameda County Economic Development Advisory Board's Business and Industry Council, among other organizations.

Sarka said Wednesday that Winn's acceptance of the job comes at a key time for the chamber.

"It's a great time for him to be joining us," Sarka said. "He'll get a chance to work right away on the budget for the new year and our ongoing programs, which is one of the first things he's probably going to be doing, next to just getting to know the community and the people here."

"He's going to be able to take a look at our organization and its structure to see how it could be improved, and have a plan to put into effect for the New Year."



Winn