

# Soldo's looking forward to not being the mayor

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Ann Soldo is beginning to find out how nice it can be to lounge around the house in the morning instead of rushing off to work.

During her four years as Watsonville mayor, Soldo found she usually had to get up early, put on a business outfit and go out to take care of her duties.

"Things are winding down," she said. "My last two weeks in May are really neat. My calendar's really empty."

After eight years on the City Council, Soldo is ready for a break. Tomorrow is her last day as mayor; her political ally Betty Murphy will be sworn in as her successor tomorrow night, and Soldo couldn't be more pleased.

Soldo supported Murphy's candidacy, and says she has had no second thoughts about her own decision to retire from local politics.

Neither does she have any regrets about entering the world of politics just one year after retiring from a career as school teacher and principal.

"Being mayor was a great accomplishment in my life, plus a wonderful learning experience," she said.

As a new city councilwoman, she knew nothing about zoning and land use, Soldo said. She also knew little about the city budget, but learned enough to pull off what she considers her greatest coup as mayor — finding money in the budget to hire six additional police officers when the city staff said it couldn't be done.

"That was a real battle and one thing I'll always remember about city government," Soldo said.

"The budget determines all of the goals of the year, and when the budget is presented to you, it is intimidating," she said. "I'm sorry I didn't really delve into it in the past."



Diane Varni

**Ann Soldo doesn't mince words when discussing City Manager Radin or City Attorney Haile.**

She said she regrets she won't be involved in this year's budget review, which begins next month.

Soldo believes one strength she brought to city government was opening up communication between the council and the public.

The two town hall meetings gave people a great chance to tell the council what was on their minds, she said, and her weekly broadcasts on KOMY Radio did just the opposite — they gave her a chance to tell the people what was on her mind and what the council had been working on.

Soldo also points to the approval of federal funding for the wastewater treatment plant as a victory during her tenure. The approval came just three days after she returned from a trip to Washington, D.C., to lobby for the funds.

Soldo had plenty of disappointments as well.

Topping the list is the 18-month frozen-food plant strike. The council remained neutral during the strike, and took a great deal of heat for not making an effort to resolve the problem.

"We could have possibly come out more publicly for the Teamsters and Mort Console's representatives to sit down at the table," Soldo said, "however, Mort Console really stonewalled."

She said she's still convinced the council had to remain neutral. Nonetheless, the strike was a real burden for the mayor, and she was relieved when it ended.

"I would have hated to have another mayor take over and have that on their shoulders," Soldo said.

Soldo was also disappointed when she couldn't get the fourth

vote she needed to prevail on certain key items before the council — allowing construction of a Ramada Inn in an industrial area and moving the city manager's office into the police station are two that stand out.

Soldo opposed both proposals, and both were approved on votes of 4-3.

She's also disappointed that the city gave three acres of the 200 block of Main Street for construction of a new post office because it leaves only two acres for commercial development.

Redevelopment as a whole has been a major disappointment for Soldo. She said she wished the council, when sitting as the Redevelopment Agency, would have paid more attention to the advice offered by the redevelopment advisory committee.

The Redevelopment Agency is afraid to "bite the bullet" on several subjects, Soldo said. "It's so hard to get a decision from the Redevelopment Agency. Everything is put off, put off."

"For eight years I've been working on redevelopment," she said, "and a lot of those years were wasted."

Soldo said perhaps she should have listened to Councilman Vido Deretich's advice a little more often.

Deretich said right from the start the city should plan to bring its sewer plant up to secondary treatment standards, rather than seek a waiver of the requirement for that higher level of treatment.

Soldo now regrets she didn't see the wisdom in Deretich's suggestion.

"Eight years ago, when that was discussed, I didn't know enough about the sewage plant," she said. "The cost was so big (for secondary treatment) and we thought it would force the food processors out of business."

"It's not going to force them out of business," she said, because sewer users will help pay for treatment plant construction. Now, the city has been fighting for years to get the waiver approved, and is still waiting. That also leaves city officials wondering about the status of federal funding to upgrade the sewer plant if the waiver is denied, Soldo said.

Soldo said Deretich was also right when he argued the city shouldn't close off a portion of Central Avenue for construction of the police station.

Soldo was Watsonville's first woman mayor, but she didn't find that to be a problem because she was used to working in a man's world when she was a school principal.

It wasn't too difficult, that is, except when it came to working with City Manager John Radin.

"John Radin has had a very difficult time accepting a woman as mayor," Soldo said. "John has worked with women, but he worked with them where he was the boss."

Soldo said Radin angered her when he indicated he didn't care what she thought about one of his proposals.

She recalled Radin saying, "Well, Ann, I know how you feel about that, but I have the four votes."

"That rankled me," Soldo said.

"John likes to have the City Council adopt all of his recommendations without being questioned," the mayor said.

Soldo said she believes City Attorney Don Haile should be more aggressive in giving the city legal advice. Haile "sits on his hands," Soldo said.

"If my attorney were like that," she said, "I think I'd hunt for another one."

"I like Don Haile, but I think I'd like him to give more legal advice," she said.

One of the most educational experiences of her mayoral term, Soldo said, was sitting through the entire trial of the lawsuit challenging the city's at-large elections. The information that came out at the trial, especially about the demographics of the city's Hispanic population, were enlightening, Soldo said.

She also came away from the trial with a determination to improve the city's affirmative action plan. The city needs to make more of an effort to hire women and members of racial minorities in top positions, Soldo said, and she hopes the new council will keep closer tabs on progress in that area.

While the council is pursuing affirmative action, redevelopment and the sewer plant expansion, Soldo plans to lead a more leisurely life.

She and her husband, Andrew, are planning to "just go day by day and have more time for each other," she said.

Soldo said she's getting too old — she'll turn 67 next week — to seek another elective office. But she pledges to remain involved in the community. She's on the board of directors of Watsonville Community Hospital and has also agreed to work on the United Way fund drive this year.

## Soldo's best advice: Study, ask questions

After eight years on the Watsonville City Council, including four as mayor, Ann Soldo has some advice for those who follow her.

To all council members she says:

"Do your homework. Study. Ask questions of department heads."

"Question the reasons why things are being done and look at how your decision will affect the city and not just special interest groups."

The mayor said she would advise council members to "not be on the council just for the title that accompanies it. Do the hard work along with it."

She'd like to see all council members accept appointments to committees and commissions, and is particularly angry that one member of her council refused to do so.

"Joe Marsano has not represented our city because he has not made the time," she said, singling him out because he is the only coun-

cilman who does not represent the city to any other agency.

To Mayor-elect Betty Murphy, Soldo offers more specific advice that refers to some of Murphy's weak points.

"I would hope she would not debate an issue beyond debate," Soldo said. As mayor, Murphy should elicit comments from the rest of the council, Soldo said.

"If you don't, they'll never say it and you'll never know what they're thinking," Soldo said.

Murphy should hold her opinion and give it only after the other council members have had a chance to speak, Soldo said.

Soldo also addressed Murphy's tendency to speak at length on certain subjects.

"She needs to be more concise." That's one thing Murphy herself knows she has to do, Soldo said, but it will be hard for her to make that change.

—Nancy Barr