

✓ Scotts Valley School Board President Mark Stone Considered Frontrunner in Race to Fill Supervisor Vacancy Challengers Boast Union Support with Davis

Board of Supervisors
by Richard Larson

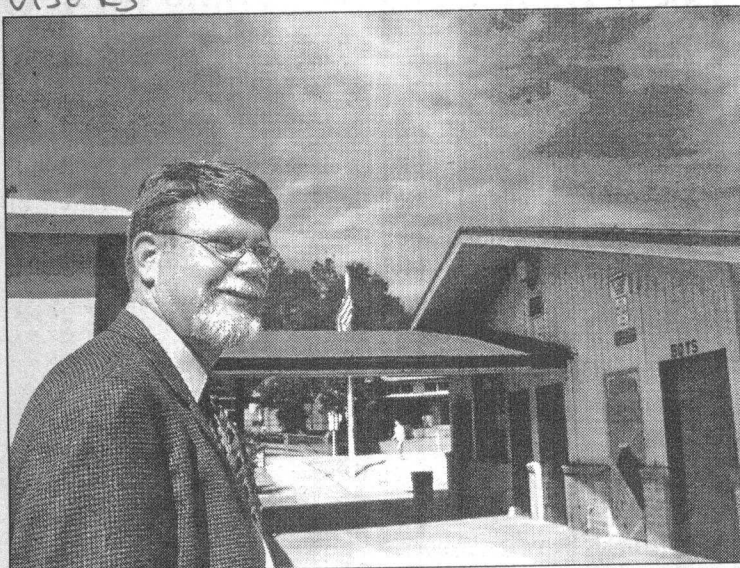
During the Sentinel Triathlon, Scotts Valley School Board President Mark Stone came out of the water just seconds after then-Supervisor Jeff Almquist. After running up the hill past the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, into the transition area and peeling off his wet suit, Stone said to Almquist, "How did you get ahead of me?" Jeff responded with a quiet, satisfied smile.

Mark Stone may be following Jeff Almquist once again as Stone appears to be the top candidate for appointment to the Fifth District Supervisor, a position left vacant after Almquist was sworn in as a Superior Court Judge earlier this month.

When Almquist's appointment to the bench was announced, Stone submitted his application to Sacramento. He contacted Almquist and others in the Valley to make his interest known. He already knew the area's powerful Democratic representatives — Assemblyman John Laird and former Assembly Speaker pro tem Fred Keeley, through his lobbying efforts on behalf of the Scotts Valley Unified School District.

Stone learned more about the Supervisors' responsibilities and who he should talk to. As of this writing Stone acknowledges that this is no sure thing. "Other candidates share similar values. I have no clue how it's going to come out."

Being a Democrat will likely help. Outgoing Governor Gray Davis is expected to make the appointment before he leaves office on Nov. 17. The appointment does not need to be confirmed by the State Senate, nor is the seat a part of the recent power struggle between Davis and newly elected Governor



Stone may jump from overseeing Scotts Valley Schools to supervising a key section of the county.

Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Having the support of a wide-range of Valley leaders likely makes Stone the frontrunner. While most will agree that Stone has the broadest support, there are few wanting to make any predictions about how Davis will respond to the pressures of the last days in office.

Whoever steps in to take Almquist's place will serve until the end of 2004. Along with getting familiar with the people, issues and communities of the Fifth District, the appointed Supervisor will also have to gear up for the reelection process which will begin next March.

Two Valleys and More

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors deals with issues ranging from abandoned cars, pot holes and dog complaints to zoning, land use and timber harvesting.

Stone recognizes the challenges of representing the interest of the District's diverse electorate.

"It is important to preserve the character of the communities. The failed RDA process, along with the town plans, pro-

vides information about how the people view their communities. In my view one very important role [of the supervisor] is constituent service; listening to, understanding and helping resolve issues important to the people I would represent. The Supervisor is the only broad based elected official in the unincorporated areas," Stone added.

Stone said he admired Almquist's and Keeley's work in office.

"I'm honored to be considered for the position following Jeff Almquist and Fred Keeley. I have a great deal of respect for both of them and I believe I share many of their ideals," he added.

Recognizing, should he be selected, that he will have to spend much of his time getting to know his constituents, Stone indicated that he would continue to hold office hours in Felton as Almquist has and perhaps, "expand that into Ben Lomond and Boulder Creek."

From Poets to Politics

Stone grew up in the Bay Area and is a graduate of UC

Berkeley where he majored in English with an emphasis on Romance Poets. After several years in the work place, he returned to school and in 1988 Stone graduated from Santa Clara School of Law.

He has since specialized in working with hi-tech companies, drafting and negotiating contracts and building strategic relationships. He was on the legal staff of Apple Computer while Apple was negotiating with IBM on one of the largest partnerships in Silicon Valley history.

Stone also spent eight years as an instructor at the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey teaching Government Contract Law, Negotiation and Acquisition and other related courses.

"By the very nature of my work, I am familiar with government regulations and laws and how to interact with government. This is a strong skill I would bring to Supervisor's position," he said.

A fifth generation Californian, Stone has been married to his wife, Kathy, for 15 years. Kathy works for Adobe as a technical writer and telecommutes from their Scotts Valley home. Their daughter Melissa attends Scotts Valley Middle School and their son Byron goes to Brook Knoll. He is the Speech and Debate coach for Scotts Valley High School and has worked on fundraising for Valley Churches United through the Harley Owners Group.

During his younger years Stone took the opportunity to travel extensively. He spent six weeks in Austria as part of a high school, summer study program. After college he lived and worked in Sweden for a year.

"It was a great experience. I worked early mornings packing newspapers and had plenty of time to travel. I was in Sweden [in 1980] when the US Olympic hockey team beat the Russians

for Gold. I was the only American in town and because hockey is so big in Sweden, I was a minor celebrity on the coat tails of the Olympic team," he recalled.

In 1998 Stone ran for and was elected to the Scotts Valley School Board. He was reelected again in 2002 and has served as president of the board for three years. Stone has served on the Delegate Assembly of the California School Boards Association. This organization works to provide information, training and leadership to school boards throughout the state. CSBA also lobbies on school issues for students in California.

Meet the New Boss

Scott Millar has worked for Fifth District Supervisors Fred Keeley and Jeff Almquist. When asked what the District staff is doing while they are waiting to find out who will be their new boss, Millar said, "We are working to assure a clean transition. Our staff will brief the new Supervisor on issues of relevance. And no, I have no idea, at this time, who it will be."

Dinah Phillips, in the County Administrative Office, made it clear that assistance is readily available. County Administrative Officer "Susan Mauriello, will meet with the new supervisor and review the responsibilities. The California Association of Counties also provides training for new supervisors. Other supervisors, department heads and staff will all assist," Phillips added. "I'm surprised an appointment has not yet been made. I'm waiting to see what happens, and when it does, [we'll] go to work to help the incoming supervisor to get up to speed."

Fifth District staff member John Backstrom said that the

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District staff "continues to attend to constituent work, and prepare files so the appointee will have what they need when they step in [to office]. The District staff serves at the pleasure of the Supervisor. It will be up to the new Supervisor to appoint new staff or retain the existing staff," Backstrom added. "Whoever is appointed will have a steep learning curve."

Candidate Stone agrees. He says there are a number of topics with which he is not yet familiar.

"I understand the learning curve will be steep. I am hoping for the broadest based support I can get. I will have to go to school on transportation, timber harvesting and water as those issues effect the district. I am aware of the situation concerning water in Felton and how hard Jeff has worked on that. I won't drop the ball. I will pick up where Jeff left off and work with the citizens of Felton to take control of their own destiny concerning water," he added.

The move from School Board to Board of Supervisors is a big jump, but one Stone believes he is prepared for.

"I first became interested in school board issues to serve the community and help maintain a strong educational experience for students. I'm interested in this office to serve the broader public. This came up rather suddenly," Stone said. "I'm good at building consensus, bridging different sides of an issue for the benefit of students. I want to apply those skills to the benefit of the people of the District. I'm a listener. I don't make hasty decisions. I hear all sides of an issue before making a decision." What would be the first order of business for Supervisor Stone should he get the appointment?

"I would open up every active file within 90 days and personally contact the people involved and do what I can to move their case forward," he promised.

As to future triathlons Stone says, "Next year, I'm coming out of the water first." □