



JULIA MOORE/SENTINEL

Lisa Ekers is the new port director for the Santa Cruz Port District. Ekers is an avid sailor and keeps a boat in the Santa Cruz harbor.

Port director brings diverse mix of experience to new job

Harbor

Ekers first woman to hold harbor's top post

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By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ — The next time devoted boater Lisa Ekers brings her 26-foot sloop Pathfinder back into the harbor from a day at sea, she won't be just any old customer. She'll be the boss.

On Friday, Ekers, a 30-resident of Santa Cruz, completed her first week as the new port director, a job she spent decades preparing for without even knowing it. A civil engineer by trade, Ekers, the first woman to hold the harbor's top job since the Port District was created 60 years ago, has experience in emergency dispatch, public works, marine management and sailing.

"I'm really thrilled to be here and have this opportunity," Ekers, 48, said. "I can't imagine something better than putting my experience and education to work in my own community."

Ekers, who was serving as engineering services manager for the city of Menlo Park, learned about the job opening at the Port District when she and husband Ed Ekers, a retired Santa Cruz fire chief, saw the job notice posted at the Harbormaster's office. The harbor's veteran employees are welcoming her.

"This is an exciting new vision," said Don

LISA EKERS

SANTA CRUZ PORT DIRECTOR

AGE: 48

HOME: Santa Cruz resident for 30 years

EXPERIENCE: Emergency dispatch, public works, marine management and sailing

FAMILY: Husband Ed Ekers

Kinnamon, senior deputy harbormaster and a 20-year employee. "We have had the current management here for 20 to 30 years. We welcome her with open arms and embrace her ideas."

Ekers replaced director Rick Smith, who was director for the last two of his 26 years at the district. Previously, Brian Foss served 33 years as director. Ekers will earn \$110,000 annually, which matches the salary of her predecessor.

The district's revenue is drawn from boat storage, launch fees and other revenue from about 40 harbor businesses. The harbor is home to about 850 docked boats and 300 boats in dry storage.

Ekers will face many challenges. Person-

nel and maintenance costs, especially those related to dredging, are outpacing revenue streams constrained by the recession and closed salmon fisheries of the past several years.

The Port District has 20 percent fewer employees than it did five years ago, down to 23 permanent employees and 45 seasonal workers. Ekers is experienced in budget administration, along with environmental management and regulatory compliance, having worked 14 years for San Mateo County's Department of Public Works before taking the Menlo Park position 2½ years ago.

Previously, she was a local emergency dispatcher, serving as manager of the Watsonville police and fire communications center when the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake struck. Her sailing experience also lends her instant immediate credibility with her new co-workers.

"It gives her a step up the ladder to have that background," said Assistant Harbormaster Larry White, a 35-year employee.

For Ekers, who also is an avid equestrian and bicyclist, the ocean is a peaceful escape.

"You can be out there a half-hour, and it's a totally different place," she said. "The concerns of the day are gone."

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LISA EKER, port director