

Getting to Know Rod Diridon, City Clerk



City Clerk, Rod Diridon, Jr.

By Carolyn Schuk

The Diridon name is legendary in Santa Clara Valley politics. But Rod Diridon, Jr. isn't resting on the family's record. After two terms on the Santa Clara City Council and one year as the city's elected City Clerk, Diridon is well on his way to writing his own distinctive chapter in public service.

Diridon was raised in Santa Clara, attending Westwood Elementary, Buchser Junior High, and Santa Clara High School. He worked his way through San Jose State University as a mechanic, earning a degree in Political Science.

After college, Diridon

worked as a substitute teacher before embarking on a business career that included working as a Global Program Manager with a high-tech company and as serving as General Manager for a start-up.

The Weekly caught up with him a few weeks ago to find out about his first year in office.

Weekly: What was it like growing up in a political family?

Diridon: My family always valued public service. I grew up walking precincts with my Dad - not just for him, but also for everybody - walking picket lines when somebody was being treated unfairly in a labor dispute, and going to park dedications. So I grew up with a very high level of expectation for public involvement

It also was fun because it was things we could do together as a family. Running for office together with my Dad and working together on a political campaign were the closest things that he and I have ever had to playing catch.

Weekly: Did you expect to go into politics?

Diridon: Well, growing up in a family like that, there was a high expectation of being involved in community service - when you leave the planet, you're going to leave it better off than it was when you got there.

Weekly: How did you decide to get into politics yourself?

Diridon: [Longtime Santa Clara political activist] Bob Quigley asked me. Before that I'd managed political campaigns myself, and enjoyed doing that, but it's a tough way to make a living.

I had gotten really involved in Democratic Party politics and served five terms on the Democratic Central Committee. I was involved in a lot of things - founding Vice Chair of the San Tomas Aquino free trail committee and later the chair of that and got involved in the library Board of Trustees here in town, and the Jaycees. Bob Quigley said, 'You know, Ron, I think you ought to run for City Council.'

Weekly: Technology was a major initiative for the City Clerk's office in the past. Are you carrying forward that legacy?

Diridon: We've taken made some major steps to improve our technology. Last year, for example, if you had a Mac or a browser other

than Internet Explorer, it was very difficult to access the online Council agenda. It took a long time to download, and in some cases, it came through garbled or with extra characters on it. The new software - we installed it last week, in fact - eliminates those difficulties.

We also updated some of the city's records management technology. We recently implemented a program called SIRE, that allows anybody at city hall with computer access to get any information the city clerk's office has access to. They can access to a reference number for electronic files they can download right there or microfiche files they can obtain. It eliminates a level of bureaucracy. It makes people more efficient in utilizing information to serve the public. This is all is extremely exciting as much for what it is now as for what it will allow us to do in coming years

Weekly: Why is this important?

Diridon: The technology in the Clerk's office is extremely important because, long-term, it will allow people to access campaign filings and reports during an election cycle. Easy access to the information is an important element of engaging the public so that they will demand that elected officials and candidates conform to our ethics ordinance.

Weekly: Every day in the news we hear about new ethical scandals in Washington and right here in San Jose. With our city's focus on ethics, do we have something positive to contribute to the conversation?

Diridon: Ethics in politics is a term that has been overused and abused for years. Usually, it's candidates pointing at somebody else and defining their own ethics as being the ethics that are correct so that they can define their opponent's ethics as being the ethics that are wrong. Oftentimes the people with the longest fingers are the people with the most to hide.

Our city, I think, is going to take the big next step in the overall ethics discussion by really, really engaging the public. Santa Clara has always been a leader. We do things in Santa Clara right the first time and, usually, before anybody else does it.

The same thing is the case regarding campaign finance reform. We're both a proactive city and also a small enough city - 108,000 people - so we can really engage the public.

Weekly: If you could just change one thing in Santa Clara overnight, what would it be?

Diridon: That we never demolished our downtown.

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