

CALISTOGA TRIBUNE

By Michelle Wing

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The new president of Calistoga Affordable Housing (CAH) is a man who likes working behind the scenes – but that doesn't mean he's afraid of shaking things up.

Larry Kromann, stepping into the spot vacated by a retiring Bob Fiddaman, says without hesitation, "I am an 'out of the box' thinker. And I've been called an 'extreme change agent.'"

But he also knows that "change" is a scary word for many people. "I have to integrate into systems in order to change systems," he said. "I think by my tweaking, CAH can meet the new challenges before us...because if we don't change and adapt, there will be consequences."

Kromann's main focus, he says, is to move away from simply being a developmental agency concentrating on low-income housing, and to grow towards being an advocate for a better life for all of Calistoga's citizens.

"I see CAH as more about the people than about the development of buildings," he said.

Kromann believes CAH's board is ready for this shift, and says they're getting more involved. One step in the right direction is the board's planned "Rebuilding Calistoga" project, which will set aside a volunteer weekend in April to improve the homes of residents throughout the city which are in need of repairs. "It will help a segment of the population, but more importantly, it will bring the community together."

Kromann has an extensive background in nonprofit work. He has a Ph.D. in education, and is ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist minister. For the past 40 years, he has worked in youth ministry, administration, and religious school development all over the country. Throughout that time, he was also very active on every kind of board imaginable. In fact, one year he served as a representative on 34 different boards at once. "I've seen a lot," he said. "And this [CAH] is a unique board. The people on it are skilled and gifted in a wide variety of things, they're very in tune with the organization's mission, and they're all very positive. That is very rare."

Kromann hopes to help mine that creative mother lode. "I'm not going to decide where the board is going, but I will bring a ton of options to them," he said.

"I want to do what I can to make Calistoga a better place to live and to be able to enjoy what being in Calistoga is all about," he said. "I see affordable housing as becoming a real main player."

Kromann said Fiddaman did an excellent job with his development projects, and moving into a new direction is no judgment of that performance. But he would like to transition into being an advocate for the total community. "I don't think people realize this, but a huge percentage of Calistoga residents would be classified as needing affordable housing," he said. "Especially since as a community our ages are much higher than the average."

With that in mind, he'd like to see more development for those in the moderate income range. "I'm not dismissing low income. There's still a huge need," Kromann said. But he also sees other needs: overall community growth, improvements to city infrastructure, and ensuring that water, or lack thereof, doesn't become an issue.

A 67-year-old retiree, Kromann is anything but idle. The CAH president isn't limiting his stake in Calistoga's future by sticking just to housing. He currently serves on the city's Water and Wastewater Revenue Advisory Committee. Along with Rex Albright and Bob Beck, he has formed the Calistoga Community Geothermal Power Corporation, a nonprofit group that he hopes will soon build a geothermal power plant for the city's use. He also established the Calistoga Springs Home Owners Association as a 501 (c) (3), to facilitate the three mobile home parks working together, helping to get things done for seniors as a protected class.

But, he said, he'd rather keep a low profile, and set his own hours. "I retired to be able to spend more of my time with things I personally like to do, and be with my family," Kromann said. "I'll set things in motion. But I can't be tied to a schedule."