

Fiddaman retires from CAH
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Bob Fiddaman is retiring from Calistoga Affordable Housing (CAH) – and all involved agree that his shoes will be hard to fill.

Fiddaman officially steps down from his position as board president on Jan. 1, after nearly a decade spent creating and leading an agency that has become an integral part of Calistoga.

Board member Susanne Deiss-Costanzo, who has been part of CAH since its founding in 2001, said, “Every cause needs its champion – and Bob from day one has been the champion for affordable housing.” She noted others in Calistoga’s history who have changed the shape of the community: Sylvia Scott with her advocacy for the pool, Trudy Bouligny with her leadership in after-school programming, and Anne Carver with her role in the formation of the Calistoga Family Center.

“It’s the individuals that make a difference,” Deiss-Costanzo said.

Board member Kelly Berryman agreed, saying, “He is an incredibly talent person who contributed a tremendous amount of time and effort for others. Calistoga is richer because of his work with affordable housing....he will be hard to replace.”

Under Fiddaman’s leadership, first as executive director and later as board president, CAH has brought affordable housing into the center of the city’s governmental discussions and decision making, said executive director Erica Roetman Sklar.

In 2005, CAH built Saratoga Manor, an 18-unit sweat equity project. In 2007, CAH took on a rehabilitation and preservation project with an existing apartment complex, making eight units livable while retaining their low-income rents. And in 2009, the agency completed the 24-unit Palisades Apartments.

Sklar said Fiddaman was also instrumental in forming housing policy, including work on the General Plan, and the development of a Local Housing Preference Policy, which gives preference for affordable housing to those who live or work in Calistoga.

Sklar said the biggest loss will be the 20 to 30 hours of time Fiddaman devoted each week to the agency, lending his knowledge and experience from earlier careers in mortgage banking, real estate and business. She said the board has discussed how to fill that gap by paying for equivalent advice, through the hiring of an outside consultant.

Board member Larry Kromann will be taking over as the new president, Sklar said. “The other board members have had to step up to the plate and find some leadership among themselves.” She said they have all committed themselves to moving the agency forward.

The 72-year-old Fiddaman said it was simply the right time to retire. He had a health scare earlier this year with prostate cancer, and although that threat is now in the past, it led him to refocus. “I’ve got other things I want to do with my life,” he said.

Fiddaman and his wife Susan Hoffman recently bought The Elms Bed & Breakfast, which they will be transforming over the next couple of years into their family home. He’s also signed up for a digital photography class at Napa Valley College.

As far as CAH goes, he said, “We’ve got staying power. This is a good time to go.”

Fiddaman said he will not be going away completely. He will continue to be available for advice, and he would like to work on affordable housing at the county level. Fiddaman currently sits on the Napa County Planning Commission. That term will expire this summer, but he said he is hopeful that if Supervisor Diane Dillon is re-elected in June, she will reappoint him. Sklar remains confident that the board is ready to move on under new leadership. “We’ve been working on this transition now for a long time,” she said. “Bob wanted to make sure we were prepared. We’ve got a lot on our plate right now, and that’s a good place for us.”

The most recent CAH proposal is Cottage Glen, a 30-unit housing development. Sklar said right now the Cottage Glen project is in a holding pattern.

“We’re in a very unstable market,” she said. “Homes are selling for the same price you can build. We’re waiting to see how the market turns around.” But that doesn’t mean the agency is idle. One new project is the launch of a Christmas in April program, where volunteers will do repairs on existing low-income homes in the spring.

In addition to Kromann, Berryman and Deiss-Costanzo, other CAH board members include Bob Beck, Kent Domogalla, Paul Ingalls, Wayne Jeronimus, Ruth Rodriguez, Sklar, and Jon Webb. Rex Albright has also been serving on the board as the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, but said his relationship with the agency will end when he leaves his job on Dec. 23.