

Brent Talks to Incumbent District II Supervisor Richard Forster

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Brent Parsons
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Before I get to Supervisor Richard Forster, I'll correct some errors I made in Gwen Clayton's story. My writing process is far from perfect. I am not a journalist or really anything by training. I'm self-taught and -motivated. I did go to college for four years, where I learned that I liked to draw, paint, think, read and write. I enjoyed working with kids as a camp counselor one summer and returned to college another year for a teaching credential, which I used professionally for as long as it took to get it — five years. Most of what I do or have done has been from an interest or financial need. Painting, playing sports, messing with the guitar and writing are pursuits born from interest. Picture framing, running a hardware store and teaching were pursuits derived from the duty to support a family before even fooling around with those other interests. Like many, I wished the enrichment pursuits paid enough to forget the mandatory ones, but that works out for very few. And maybe, if the "artistic" endeavors ever paid off, they would have become work. I'd like to have tested that theory longer than the two months I was an artist — between a full-time junior high teacher and picture framer — in the summer of 1979, but I felt too guilty and vulnerable without a real job.

I prefaced my two-part series with Gwen by reporting that she was one of only a couple among the dozens I've interviewed to decline my offer of a draft review. Gwen's trusting gesture, made by a writer with journalistic experience, was appreciated, but may have been a mistake. I made some errors in translating my scribbled notes into story form. Gwen called my attention to three after publication, but considered them not worthy of doing what I'm doing — publicly correcting them. I'm not listening to her this time, just as I didn't well enough the first time. Here are four: 1) She was hired by the county in 2007, not 2004, which is when she moved to Amador. 2) The County Assessor is an office, not a department. 3) The incomplete list of organizations I listed that Gwen supports does not mean she is a member of them. 4) Husband Eddie retired from the Army. He spent four years as a Marine. Those are the misstatements or misleading inferences that Gwen identified. Supervisor Forster will see a draft.

Politicians, especially those involved in an election, have a special interest in the accuracy of what someone who asks for an interview says they said. Campaigns have enough distortion without me adding to it. I will never let a preview change my characterization of our conversation, but will welcome corrections to the facts of a personal story that were wrongly recorded or reported - like sequence, dates or technicalities. The subject knows them better than I. A suggestion was made that I tape-record for assurance. That sounds too much like a real job.

Jerry Budrick, my encouraging editor and friend, is back at the Ledger Dispatch. I told him I was talking to candidates for Supervisor in District 4 and he suggested I do likewise in District 2. Long-time and usually unchallenged Richard Forster now has a challenger, Amber Hoiska. I couldn't locate Amber in the phone book, but Richard is not only listed but broadcasts his number on TV and radio. He also has an amador.gov email address. We looked for a date and chose 9 a.m. on a holiday at the county building. We both had

obligations later, me a truck to unload and him a dispute between neighbors to resolve. I'd take the truck any day. We sat down in a conference room and he began talking about issues he's involved with at the state level through his positions on Rural County Representatives of California and the California State Association of Counties. I tactfully tried to stop or at least slow him down, not for disinterest, but incomprehension. Once he realized that he had left me in the dust within a minute, he apologized, saying, "Stop me if you need to. I know I can talk." He has plenty of material to talk about as I found out in the conversation, which was cut short at two hours, because of my truck.

I requested that he start his story further back and he did, but not far enough. I asked where he was born and that worked. "South Laguna, in Orange County," he replied. "My family had deep roots there. My great-great-great-grandfather married Isadora Pico, the sister of the last Mexican governor of California, Pio Pico. At one time, my ancestors owned the land including Camp Pendleton and San Juan Capistrano Mission. Abe Lincoln took it away and gave it back to the Catholics. By rights, I shouldn't be a Republican or a Catholic, but I'm both."

Orange County had cattle country then and the Forsters owned a piece of it, until development encouraged a move. Richard's dad bought a ranch near Paso Robles. He and his wife, Rosemary, with their six sons, relocated north when Richard was two, in 1962. Thirteen years later, Jerry Forster repeated the process and sold the 15,000 acres in San Luis County. He bought a 5,000-acre spread west of Lone, fronted by Highway 88, next to the Bamert Ranch, which was flatter and wetter than the central coast hills. Richard said his dad, like many ranchers, was in quest of the perfect piece of land. The Forsters ran 500-600 head of "commercial cows" for the calves that were sold. Richard entered Lone High School as a sophomore and went on to U.C. Davis after graduation, while his girlfriend, Laurie, went to Sac State. They married in 1982, shortly after college. (Former supervisor and neighbor rancher Tom Bamert also married his Lone High School girlfriend. The school may be small, but has proven to be a fertile hunting ground.) Richard brought his degree in Agriculture and Managerial Economics back to work on the family ranch.

Richard got involved in his community early. As a resident of Lone, he joined the planning commission and the city's Technical Advisory Committee when it replaced the commission. At 22, he was the youngest appointee by a governor to a county fair board, where he served 17 years. (Laurie, currently on the fair board, has served a dozen years). Later, he was the president of Amador, El Dorado and Sacramento's Cattleman's Association the same year he was the president of Lone's Native Sons. Daughter Lindsey was born in 1985 and Tyler two years later. (Thirty years later, they live a couple of miles away, in Lone, with four granddaughters — every parent's dream). In 1990, the Forsters moved out of the city to some acreage on Sutter Lone Road. He gave up his city positions with his residency but picked up a county one in 1992 by winning a seat on the Amador Water Agency. He and his brother, Dan, continued to ranch for six more years until, in 1998, they parted ways and his parents sold the ranch. Richard had decided to pursue a career with corrections, Lone's big, two-facility employer. He interviewed at Stockton's state youth facility and was offered a few jobs in the state system. He liked the Stockton opportunity and commuted a couple of years until he was recruited to be a counselor by the youth camp in Pine Grove. He stayed there for 12 ½ years, retiring in 2013. Laurie taught school for 25 years in Calaveras. She moved to the Gold Strike, the continuation high school, after a stint teaching sixth grade. Both she and Richard liked working with the kids most teachers prefer that someone else deal with. They were that someone else.

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