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Casting a new light on John Knight

“What you see is what you get,” was John Knight’s answer when asked if he had anything he wanted people to know about him — or not to know about him. No wacky tattoos and no secrets.

El Dorado County’s District 1 supervisor admitted, however, he does enjoy a good cigar and a shot of sour mash from time to time.

“Not unlike Jack Sweeney,” he added. (Sweeney serves on the board with Knight as supervisor of District 3.)

Knight is the fourth generation of elected officials from his family. Great-grandfather Jesse Knight served on the Los Angeles Fruit Exchange in the late 1800s. That organization eventually became the Sunkist Corp. Grandfather Thomas F. Knight was a member of the California State Assembly in the 1940s and ’50s. His father Thomas F. Jr. served on the local water board in the La Canada area, and John was elected to the El Dorado Hills Fire District before winning the District 1 supervisorial seat two years ago. He plans to run for supervisor again after the current term.

When not doing the county’s business at the Government Center or at some regional committee meeting, Knight said he may be found performing Rotary activities with the El Dorado Hills club. If not doing that, he’s likely to be involved in some project in his role as a director on the Marshall Hospital Foundation. The latter he calls a “wonderful experience.”

Otherwise, he said, he might be mowing the lawn or cleaning the pool at his El Dorado Hills home.

During his early years, Knight lived on and off at the family’s citrus ranch in La Canada and in Sacramento where his father worked as a lobbyist for the California Manufacturers Association. As a youth, he worked in fruit packing houses, on a relative’s cattle ranch and for another relative’s construction company in Arizona.

Injuries cut his college football career short at the University of Utah, and Knight later completed a BS degree in Finance and Economics at Cal State Long Beach.

“I was always good at finance, and my family was always in business,” he said, so getting into banking and commercial real estate was a natural fit.

The injuries that kept Knight out of football also prevented him from becoming a naval aviator. Having failed the requisite test the first time, he became an aviator on his own time, eventually passed the Navy’s test but was ultimately rejected by Navy doctors. His father, who had been a Navy officer in World War II and was at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, offered to plead John’s case with his good friend Admiral Steve Morrison. The younger Knight persuaded Dad not to do



John Knight, 63, at home in El Dorado Hills, says he likes to start the day with the Wall Street Journal. Mother Lode News photo by Shelly Thorene

that. (The admiral's own son was the legendary Jim Morrison, founder and lead singer of The Doors.)

Knight, wife Georgi (Georgianne), son Cliff and daughter Joy moved to El Dorado County when he was transferred to head up the real estate division of Security Pacific Bank for the Sacramento area about 20 years ago. His first grandchild was born to Cliff and his wife three weeks ago.

Despite numerous meetings and 10 to 12 hours a week of reading and doing research as part of his official duties, Knight said he always saves time for a walk with Georgi on weekends, keeps up with the home chores and "I still have time to do my own reading."

Strictly non-fiction, he prefers history, technical and financial works. Recent books include biographies of Henry Clay, the great 19th Century statesman, and President James Polk. Another one on his to-read list is Alan Greenspan's "The Age of Turbulence," which he anticipates will help feed his appetite for "trends and demographics" related to technology and finance.

As a county supervisor, Knight participates on 15 different boards, commissions or committees — CSAC (California State Association of Counties), SACOG (Sacramento Area Council of Governments) and a dozen others, both local and regional. He recalled that part of the job description as being the "biggest surprise" after being elected.

"Because there is so much money involved, collaboration with those organizations is a big part of the job. And I felt fortunate being on the Planning Commission and the fire district board, which gave me lots of experience with many of the issues and areas of concern (to government and to the public), such as land use and public financing. Land use is a major thing when you consider CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act), the Map Act, Environmental Protection Act and all the regulations and laws affecting land use. Engineers and landowners have a tremendous amount at stake on any given project, and that has to be considered.

"But I was really clueless in the areas of health and human services, and I was shocked when we interviewed Daniel Nielson for director of Human Services. He said he would be managing 125 different programs. I had no idea," he recalled.

Another surprise, he said, has been that he does not get calls in the middle of the night about potholes or endangered species or whatever else might be on a constituent's mind. In four years as a planning commissioner and two years as a supervisor, he said he has only received one after-hours call.

"It was when I was on the Planning Commission, and I don't even remember what it was about. The most important thing is that people feel they are being heard and understood. What I want to hear is, 'Thank you. My concerns have been answered.'"

Knight said he entertains no ambitions for higher political office.

"This was something that just happened, and I believe you can be most effective at the local level," he said. "I'm very content and at peace as a supervisor. I enjoy the county and I'm very pleased with the quality of our staff. They're dedicated and passionate and very professional."

Unfinished business to be taken up in a second term would include the Silva Valley Interchange project, connecting the El Dorado Trail to Folsom and improving the organization of fire districts, Knight said.

"I'm fascinated by the issue of water, and I'd like to see our county be a place where people want

to do business,” he added

Knight explained that he does not take advantage of the county’s medical benefits but is on a policy through his wife’s job with the state. He also noted on Monday morning before a special board meeting that he has made three attempts to follow through on the board’s decision to allow supervisors to reduce their salary, but so far, “bureaucracy” is getting in the way.

When Georgi retires from her position as a speech pathologist with the California State Department of Education, Knight said they would like to do a bit of traveling. They have toured Mexico and Canada and some of the U.S., but he’d like to see the nations of the Mediterranean and the British Isles. An accomplished fly fisherman, he said he really wants to try for trout in Alaska and Montana (mostly catch-and-release), he explained.

And if he could just take tomorrow off and do whatever he wanted?

“I’d go fishing.”

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