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## Popular Financial Services Manager to Retire

By Cathy Tyson



After almost a quarter century, Gonzalo Silva is ready to retire. Photo C. Tyson

Gonzalo's work, the city boasts 23 consecutive balanced budgets, \$7 million in reserve, and a AAA bond rating from Standard and Poors. Only 25 of California's almost 500 cities have earned the coveted AAA rating. In an era when many cities are struggling - with some even bankrupt - Lafayette stands apart, and great credit for that goes to Gonzalo Silva."

"He personally inspects and approves every request for payment before it's processed to ensure that the taxpayer's money was being spent efficiently," says Tracy Robinson, administrative services director, who added that his skill at employee birthday "game lunches" is legendary.

Originally from Santiago, Chile, Silva came to the U.S. to attend high school, then went on to graduate from San Francisco State University, finally settling down in Moraga with his wife and young son in the early 1970s.

He's proud to report that in his entire tenure with the city of Lafayette, through countless audits, there have never been any issues; by design, the municipal accounting system is completely transparent. Anyone can investigate via the city website - expenses, revenue, salaries and benefits, spending on roads and capital improvement projects. "People who pay taxes have a right to know," explains Silva.

With a fiscal year General Fund expenditure budget of \$12.2 million, it's amazing to consider that each and every bill that keeps the city running, along with payroll for the entire 40-person staff is handled by Silva, one other accountant and one part time employee.

He instigated moving payroll in-house shortly after his arrival, saving a substantial amount in fees and keeping control of the entire process. Employees get paid every two weeks electronically with direct deposit. Bills from vendors get paid promptly as well.

Describing himself as a number cruncher and computer nerd, Silva easily made the transition from a paper-based system to computerization. He has a 401 K plan, like all city staff, no CalPERS here, and has been diligently contributing the maximum of 15 percent of his salary, along with an additional 5 percent into his retirement account.

It took him four years to make the final retirement decision, knowing he would miss his co-workers, because of little turnover, great morale and a friendly environment, "it's like working with family," he says. The feeling is mutual, Falk notes, "We will miss him tremendously."

Although he was recently in Europe, he's planning a trip to France in June, and many additional destinations in the future. He's also looking forward to spending time researching stock investments and playing the very addictive Words with Friends without interruption.

For 23 years Gonzalo Silva has been keeping the books, paying all the bills and making sure the city's finances are running smoothly. Now he's finally ready, at age 71, to retire. While he acknowledges that it is "easy to come to work every day," with very friendly supportive staffers, "enough is enough."

The long hours he spends as Lafayette's financial services manager will be wrapping up in March. He's been working since his days as a teenager; his first job was a paper route for the now defunct San Francisco Progress newspaper. He's currently responsible for all of the day-to-day financial processing, accounts payable and receivable, maintaining cash flow, preparing state regulatory reports, coordinating audits, budget preparation and more. City manager Steven Falk has nothing but compliments for Silva, who he describes as "simply one of the nicest fellows you'll ever meet" and who "brought discipline, high standards, an uncompromising eye for quality, and a strong work ethic to the office every single day."

Calling the city's accounting operations "in shambles" when Gonzalo arrive in 1990, with just \$950,000 in reserves, Falk explains, "Today, due in large part to

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[back](#)

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