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City thanks retiring Parks and Rec Commissioner for 15 years of service

By Lou Fancher



Brook Street Park ribbon cutting on April 18.
Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

Oregon, Poole grew up camping, fishing, hiking and participating in sports, including competitive soccer during college. While team sports have him tapping into the energy of a group, he says fishing feeds his soul and teaches him patience and to slow down and appreciate the natural environment.

Lafayette PTR Director Jonathan "ACE" Katayanagi says Poole stood out as a respected leader on the commission whose legal background often served the city well. Among the many projects during Poole's years on the commission and its subcommittees are the Petanque Courts and Multi-Sport Rink, improvements to the Community Park Play Area, dedication of the Bellenger Trail, renovation of the Cedar Room, Brook Street Park, and Community Center Restrooms, and the construction of the Jennifer Russell Building.

"Mark would listen to all viewpoints in meetings and would go the extra mile to make sure he was understanding what residents wanted to communicate to the Commission," Katayanagi says. "He would work to find common ground. Where there might be a difference of opinion, he would take the time to explain his reasoning so there was always an understanding of how he came to decisions."

Completed projects such as the replacement of the children's playground at the southern end of the Community Park and the addition of play features at Brook Street Park he says are important and positive for families with young kids. The addition of the Batwing property, a 22-acre area that will be developed into a nature park, Poole marks as most significant, while noting his absence from the process. "I live within 500 feet of the property, so I had to recuse myself from the commission's part in that project," he explains.

Success for the 51-year-old resident who moved with his young family to the city in 2004, is marked by projects he says reflect the commission's greatest positive energy, commitment to improving the community, and demonstration of synergistic team work.

"You might find it strange, but things that stand out are projects that failed more than projects that succeeded," he says. "We had two big projects, Lafayette Bike Park in the early 2010s, and the Deer Hill Community Park that would have been part of the development of 45 homes, a dog park, and desperately needed sports field and children's play area. The Deer Hill project ended in a public referendum that voted it down. They stand out to me because the commission functioned well, worked hard, and developed good plans that would have served the community. They would have added real value. So I'm proud of that process."

Asked which role models had the most influence on his service as an adult, Poole speaks immediately of family. "My volunteer ethic stems from my parents. Both were tremendous examples. My father worked as a public servant; as a judge for 35 years. My mother was a longtime teacher and high school counselor who volunteered with churches, (organizations that serve) the homeless, and teens who were struggling. My parents set the tone for contributing to your community in an altruistic way."

As Lafayette grows, the need for balance between increased housing density, new retail and restaurant businesses, greater population and maintaining park and recreation areas is essential, according to Poole. "We have to anticipate growth and maintain livability and quality of life. The Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission will serve an important role in acquiring additional park properties and we all know land is more

The Lafayette City Council at its June 27 meeting recognized longtime Parks, Trails and Recreation Commissioner Mark Poole for his impressive 15 years of volunteer service. Poole will be ending his term due to his workload increasing and demanding more of his time, but he also says 15 years on the commission leave him believing it's time for new ideas and new energies.

"We need refreshing," Poole says. "I'm not saying a new commissioner has to be younger, but representation of younger families is lacking on some committees and we need all elements represented. It's someone else's time."

In his "real life," Poole is a Deputy Attorney General for the California Department of Justice whose work centers on environmental law. He is married and the father of two children, a college-age son and a daughter who this year graduated from Acalanes High School. A native of

and more expensive and harder to find."

The pressures of a thriving, semi-urban city and the complexities for volunteers, council members, city staff, and residents of the community working to maintain balanced growth might, but don't cause Poole to worry. "I've been so impressed during my time in how many people volunteer in Lafayette. It's been rewarding to be a small part of it. I've learned so much about how the city functions and I tell people I'd love to see more people involved."

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