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City Bids Farewell to Departing Council Members

The City of Perris said goodbye to a pair of longtime City Council members this week, heaping gifts, praise, proclamations and well-wishes to Al Landers and Mark Yarbrough, who together served the City for 37 years.

Landers and Yarbrough were praised by members of the audience, fellow City Council members and managers for their steering Perris through some of its most difficult financial years in its 103-year history and for placing Perris on firm financial ground. The two were also hailed for helping bring residential developers and major corporations to Perris which have provided thousands of local jobs and millions in tax revenues.

Landers and Yarbrough were honored by the City of Perris, American Legion Post 595, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 888 and the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency.

"We have accomplished a lot together," said Perris Mayor Daryl Busch. "I'm pleased with the direction we've got the City pointed in. We want to continue to do good things."



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers embraces City Councilman Al Landers after presenting him with a statue of a bronze eagle during the Nov. 24 Perris City Council meeting.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers called Landers and Yarbrough dear friends she knew long before her election to the City Council in 1999.

"You have been tremendous friends to this City," Rogers said. "The most important thing you can leave is a legacy. We have worked hard to leave a legacy."

City Councilman Julio Rodriguez said Landers and Yarbrough will "go down in history of this City as two of those who helped save this City."

Praise also came from City Manager Richard Belmudez, who said that whenever the two councilmen presented administrators with challenging tasks, they provided the resources necessary to get the job done.

"You did more than talk the talk," Belmudez said. "You walked the walk."

Landers and Yarbrough said they wish the new City Council well and stand ready to offer advice if called upon.

"You will be so proud of the future of the City of Perris," Landers said. "I like to think we were a small part of the success the City is experiencing and will experience in the coming years. God bless the City of Perris."

Yarbrough thanked his wife and family for supporting him during this time as an elected official.

"Life is a book," Yarbrough said. "One chapter has closed, another has opened."

Landers and Yarbrough will be replaced by newcomers David Starr Rabb and Tonya Burke, who will take the dais for the first time on Dec. 9.



Members of the Perris City Council pose for a photo during the Nov. 24 Council meeting: Julio Rodriguez, Al Landers, Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers, Mark Yarbrough and Perris Mayor Daryl Busch.

Rough beginnings

Landers was first elected to the City Council in 1995. Yarbrough joined him a year later on the dais. Those were difficult times for Perris as the City was days away from being forced to declare bankruptcy and faced the possibility of disincorporation.

Painful choices kept Perris afloat. Parks were shuttered, staff was laid off, other municipal employees took major pay cuts. The City's 85-year-old police department and fire departments were replaced by the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and CalFire.

The cuts helped stabilize the City's budget. Then the City Council began attracting new developers and businesses—Lowe's, Whirlpool, Hanes, Home Depot and Ross—that revitalized Perris' bottom line.

Both councilmen credit hard-working managers, staff and unified decision-making body with helping turn Perris around. The City in recent years has enjoyed tremendous success that has attracted regional, state and national attention and awards. Major projects completed in recent years include the revitalization of historic D Street, the opening of Mercado Park and the low-income Mercado Apartments, completion of the Big League Dreams sports complex and the Drop Zone aquatic center, construction of new interchanges at Fourth Street and Ramona Expressway, ongoing construction of a new super Wal-mart and a Metro-link center the recent groundbreaking of a new soccer complex at Patriot Park.

In 2012, the City's success and commitment to its residents paid off in awards by the National League of Cities, the League of California Cities and the Municipal Managers Association of Southern California for Perris' work to construct a new sewer system to replace outdated and leaking septic tanks in the disadvantaged community of Enchanted Heights. The City repeated that trifecta of accolades this year for its Live Well Perris healthy-eating active-living campaign.



Tim Moore, commander of VFW Post 888, presents outgoing City Councilman Mark Yarbrough with a plaque thanking him for supporting veterans' issues.

Teamwork made it happen

Landers credited the entire City Council for those successes.

"We did it as a council," he said. "I was just part of the team. Everyone respected each other and we all got along."

Landers said he will be available to the incoming City Council members should they seek his advice. He said he plans on concentrating on his real estate business, traveling and spending time with his children and grandchildren. He said he views his greatest accomplishment as having the words "In God We Trust" placed on the City logo.

"I feel very relaxed," he said. "I am proud of where the City of Perris came from and the path we are on. I am proud of my time serving this great City."

Yarbrough said he too is grateful for his time on the City Council because it provided "the opportunity to work with amazing people from business, the community, staff and management." Perris has transformed itself from a City on the edge to a well-run community with healthy budget reserves and unlimited potential for growth," he said.

"We are one of the best run, well-respected and financially solvent cities in the state, if not the country," Yarbrough said.

He said one of his most satisfying accomplishments took place in 2013 when he traveled to Sacramento to lobby state legislators to appropriate money to save Lake Perris by strengthening its dam to withstand a major earthquake. The Sacramento trip came after Yarbrough lobbied a dozen City Councils in Riverside County to support a Perris petition to save the lake. The result: \$140 in state monies and ongoing construction at Lake Perris which should be finished by next year.

Yarbrough said he plans on devoting more time to his towing company and automotive repair businesses and spending time on his hobbies—skiing, playing bass guitar and working on race cars. He said he enjoys public service and will continue to support causes and organizations that improve the lives of Perris residents.

"It's in my nature to serve," he said. "I will always make myself available in whatever capacity I can to serve this community."

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