



Perris News

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Councilman John Motte Retiring

When John Motte was first elected to the Perris City Council, he brought with him a book made up of about 25 proposals and concerns that he wanted to see City decision-makers address.

His Bible, he called the book.

Among Motte's areas of concern: Too many claims and lawsuits against the City were being litigated by attorneys instead of being turned over to Perris' insurance company and redevelopment agency money was not going to renovate troubled buildings but was being spent on staff salaries.

Nine years later, as Motte prepares to step down from the council and return to private life, he says most of the issues in the Bible have been worked out or resolved.

He's also proud to have served the City "at a good time" and played a role in placing Perris on sound financial ground while renovating downtown streets and refurbishing and reopening the historic Depot building on 4th Street and the City Council chambers. Motte also helped find the property that became Sky Dive Park.

"It's been a lot of fun," Motte said from his office in the Southern Hotel on D Street, which he helped rebuild after a fire and will one day become a historical museum. "I've enjoyed working with the other members of the council."

Motte, 63, grew up in a family with deep roots in the Perris Valley. As a kid he worked in the fields, planting and harvesting potatoes, sugar beets and alfalfa. He earned a degree in finance from California State University, Fullerton, but returned to work the land after graduation. He served as a trustee on the Mount San Jacinto College board for 13 years. He was elected to the Perris City Council in 1999 and re-elected four years later.

When he came aboard the City's financial situation was precarious. Perris had gone through 10 city managers in the previous decade and a financial crisis forced the City Council to cut staff, disband its police department and scale back other municipal services. Gradually the city righted its ship as the economy improved in the late 1990s and early 2000s and attracted more commercial/industrial and residential development.

Motte credits City Manager Richard Belmudez and Assistant City Manager Ron Carr with putting in place a management team that functions smoothly with other staff and elected officials while keeping its eye on the bottom line. Perris, which tottered on the brink of financial collapse a decade ago, now has a multimillion dollar reserve.

"I don't see how we can get any better," he said. "I hope the new council will keep them in place."

Fellow councilmember Mark Yarbrough said Motte brought knowledge, perspective and savvy to the council dais.

"John's a very even-keel guy who is easy to get along with and works well with other people," Yarbrough said. "The City has made huge strides since he's been on the council and John deserves full credit. We've gotten financial solvency and we're not cutting jobs. That's a reflection on John."

Motte plans to remain active in City affairs when he leaves the council officially in December. He will continue developing a commercial site of Perris' south end into a shopping center. He said he would like to serve as a public member of the City's Park Committee. Motte said he would also like to see Perris adopt a system of trails that would allow residents to travel from the Downtown area to Lake Perris on the north side.

He'll be busy on other projects as well. Motte is working on a museum that will celebrate the Perris Valley's agricultural history and his own family's legacy. The museum will become host to about 30 vintage automobiles and farm implements. His daughter, Sarah, is working on developing a museum at the Southern Hotel that will tell the story of the region over a century and pay tribute to the legacy of Bernardo and Marcelina Bernasconi, Swiss immigrants who opened and operated the Southern Hotel.



The Motte family is working to turn part of the historic Southern Hotel into a museum celebrating the Perris Valley.



Perris City Councilman John Motte helped restore the historic Southern Hotel when it was ravaged by fire in the 1980s.

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