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Habib Motlagh Recognized for 30 Years of Service to the City of Perris



Perris City Engineer Habib Motlagh stands outside the office of the company he founded in 1988-Tri Lake Consultants. Motlagh and his company have been responsible for numerous construction and infrastructure improvements that have increased the quality of life in Perris.

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It was 1971 and a young Habib Motlagh had just received permission from the Iranian government to continue his studies in the U.S.

Motlagh was eager to get to America.

So eager he slept on the grounds of the American Embassy in Tehran, Iran, to ensure he would get his exit visa the next morning. Thus began a 47-year-odyssey that saw Motlagh land in New York, travel to Columbia, Mo., to earn an engineering degree and eventually take up residence in Southern California.

In 1988, Motlagh became City Engineer in Perris. In 2018, he and the firm he founded—Tri-Lake Consultants Inc.—are celebrating three decades of helping reshape the City through a series of major construction projects from one end of Perris to the other.

Those include:

*New interchanges along Interstate 215 through the City-- at Fourth Street, Nuevo Road and Ramona Expressway.

*The ongoing widening of Perris Boulevard from Fourth Street to Nuevo Road, set for completion in the coming weeks.

*Expansion of the Ehanac Road Corridor between I-215 and Goetz Road, which will ease congestion for thousands of daily commuters and open south Perris to residential and commercial development.

*Expansion and paving of Harley Knox Boulevard from I-215 to Perris Boulevard, opening a new transportation corridor in north Perris.

*Partnering with Eastern Municipal Water District to install a new sewer system in the Enchanted Heights community, replacing leaking septic tanks that sometimes overran and spilled raw sewage.

*Numerous sidewalks, curb and gutter projects, flood-mitigation efforts, bicycle and pedestrian lanes, walking bridges, ramps and traffic signals.

*Repaving of City streets as part of a continuous rehabilitation program and remaking Downtown Perris

More than a job

It's been a successful professional relationship for Motlagh and the City. But the relationship involves more than business. He has sponsored high-school seniors planning to pursue higher education in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) studies. And he recently wrote a check to help pay for a future fitness court at Paragon Park.

"I love this City," he said. "This is where my career started taking off, where I could make some decisions to help the City move forward."

He admits to "being as scared as you can be" when he became City Engineer at 35. But he said the City administration and elected Councilmembers "believed in me and trusted me."

"Thirty years later, I'm doing the same job but hopefully with more wisdom and discretion," he said. "I want to continue to give back to the City that has become such an important part of my life."

Perris elected representatives praised Motlagh as a tenacious advocate for the City when working with residential, commercial and industrial developers. Motlagh will always push for what's best for Perris, even if that means imposing additional conditions and costs on developers.

"He looks after our City," said Mayor Michael Vargas. "He's handling our infrastructure improvements and he is committed to improving our City."

Vargas noted that winter rains caused major flooding in low-lying parts of the City in years past. But thanks to the efforts of Motlagh and Tri-Lake engineers to improve Perris flood-control measures, the risk of catastrophic flooding has been greatly reduced.

"We're grateful for the help he is providing us," Vargas said.

Mayor Pro-Tem Malcolm Corona attributed much of Perris' progress to Motlagh's doggedness and "his drive to develop our City now and in the future."

"He's a great guy you can always trust to make the right decisions that will benefit our City," Corona said. "It's been a pleasure to work with him. His work is more than a job—he takes a personal interest in making Perris a better place."

An institution

City Councilwoman Tonya Burke called Motlagh "a major institution" in Perris.

In addition to supporting various other charities, Burke said Motlagh has given her funds to pay for the annual backpack giveaway she sponsors for children returning to school after summer vacation.

His decades in Perris also provides perspective and experience to relative newcomers like her. Burke was elected in 2014. She also credited Motlagh and Tri-Lake for landing nearly \$50 million in regional, state and federal funds since 2005 to help pay for Perris improvement projects.

"Mr. Motlagh has seen our City grow and he makes sure we get the resources we need to maintain our growth and development," Burke said.

City Councilman David Starr Rabb said Motlagh provides a link to the community's past, having seen Perris grow from a population of about 20,000 when he became City Engineer to nearly 80,000 today.

Like his colleagues, Rabb said he appreciated Motlagh reaching into his own pockets to help fund worthy projects like the fitness court at Paragon Park.

"We appreciate his dedication to the City," Rabb said.

City Councilwoman Rita Rogers has worked with Motlagh for 19 years as an elected representative. She said his nickname among developers is "the bulldog" because of his tenacity in dealing with them.

"He is a strong advocate for us, he is always fighting to get the best possible deal for our City," Rogers said. "He's always asking developers to give us the max—and I applaud him for that. He has been a stabilizing force in the City. He's helped weather us through challenges and recessions."

Past challenges, bright future

One of the most serious challenges took place in 1995, during a period when Perris hung on a financial precipice brought about by a long recession, disharmony among elected representatives and instability caused as a result of a lack of executive staff leadership.

Motlagh said he was on vacation when he received a telephone call to return to Perris. He was named City Manager. For the next several months, he and a reformed City team stabilized the financial situation—which included making the painful decision to switch law-enforcement services from the Perris Police Department to the Riverside County Sheriff's Department--and laid the groundwork for fiscal recovery.

At the time, Motlagh said he took on the challenge because he could not abandon the City that launched his career.

The Perris of 2018 is a vastly different agency than the one from the mid-1990s.

Today there's a seamlessness and sense of teamwork between the senior City administration, City Councilmembers and municipal employees. Everyone pulls in the same direction, shares the same vision, forges the same goal: making a great City better every day.

"Today the City of Perris is setting the example for other cities to follow," he said. "This is a great city to work in."

And he's grateful to the U.S. for turning a young immigrant into a widely admired and successful business owner, mentor and community leader.

"This is the land of opportunity," he said. "There is no denying the opportunity this country has given me."

Motlagh and his wife, Rebecca, are the parents of two sons—Sean, a University of California, Irvine, graduate who works in environmental design and Jamal, a Princeton University graduate with an MBA from Harvard, who works in finance. Motlagh is a huge fan of Manchester United, a British soccer team that competes in the English Premier League.



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