

From The Committee to (Not) Re-Elect Cliff Newell

Cliff Newell Retires After More than 20 Years with the District Attorney's Office

"It's a wrap. I had a list of goals that I wanted to accomplish," says Cliff Newell with a wry smile. "One by one, my exceptional staff and I addressed each challenge over the years. My work is complete. It's time for someone with a new list."

Cliff Newell was elected as Nevada County District Attorney in 2006, following the footsteps of Mike Ferguson, who also served as the DA for 16 years.

"What stands out most about Cliff's long service to the people of Nevada County is his empathy and understanding of what truly constitutes justice. Whether you were the family of a crime victim or the family of a defendant, you could trust Cliff to be, above all, fair," said Joe Alexander, Eldorado County Assistant DA, and Cliff's former Assistant DA. "I am honored to

have worked for Cliff and lucky to have him as a friend. I wish him all the best in his well-deserved retirement."



During his tenure, Cliff set out to modernize the office. Attorneys, in general, have a set of valuable skills, however, keeping up with technology is usually not one of them. Historically, Deputy DA's would carry large boxes of files to court. Cliff focused on modernizing the case management system, allowing each deputy district attorney access to his/her many case files at the touch of a laptop computer button.

Newell worked very closely with the other elected California DA's to educate the legislature and fortify victim's rights. "It was a pleasure working and collaborating with Cliff. He has been committed to serving the citizens of Nevada County and keeping them safe. He will be missed, and I wish him well in retirement," said Scott Owens, recently retired Placer County District Attorney.

Newell is regarded by his colleagues and staff as the person who helps define the problem, and craft the appropriate response. His door is always open. Using a quiet voice, his consummate wisdom, integrity, empathy, and a quick wit, brings a sense of competence and calm to his position.

Cliff shifted to “paperless” electronic files and administrative systems, resulting in higher efficacy and efficiency for his staff, and other members of the criminal justice process. This particular shift allowed the Office to smoothly transition operations one year ago, when the world shut down due to COVID-19. “COVID. Well, I have earned some extra gray hairs over the past year. My staff handled the challenges really well. We plan to continue to utilize some of the painful, but valuable lessons and tools that we learned during the shutdown.”

Newell, started working in Nevada County as a probation officer in 1999. He was an attorney then, and this position gave him the opportunity to learn many facets of the criminal justice system as he advanced through his career. “One of my goals was to make the DA’s office a proactive part of the solution, in addition to holding criminals accountable.”

“Cliff is genuinely an empathetic person. A trait that is often too rare among prosecutors,” said Assistant District Attorney Chris Walsh. “Whatever the particular case or situation, he sincerely cares about the people involved. This could be the victim of a crime. It could also be the defendant. Cliff has an ability to understand what others are going through.”



The whims of criminal justice policy can be difficult to navigate. During challenging moments when the legislature and electorate changed laws and budgets, Cliff championed multi-disciplinary programs such as Mental Health Court, Adult Drug Court, DUI Court, and Mental Health Diversion. Each of these programs seeks to hold offenders accountable, while also addressing the underlying causes of the criminal behavior. “These intensive programs involve the Courts, Probation, Behavioral Health and the Public Defender’s office.” According to Newell, “they have proven to be cost-effective and highly successful in reducing recurring criminal behavior.”

According to Walsh, “Cliff has led the District Attorney’s Office with this compassionate approach towards seeking justice.”

At 64 years, and the father of four adult children, Cliff plans to stay in Nevada City with his wife Katy. As an outdoor enthusiast, there will be much skiing, cycling and diving in the future. Once the world opens, he is looking forward to traveling. He’s especially looking forward to sailing his boat down to Mexico and up to the San Juan Islands. A lifelong dream.

“It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve this community,” says Newell.

Fair Winds Mr. Newell.