

# CTC's go-to guy saying goodbye after 25 years



Ray Lacey is retiring from the California Tahoe Conservancy after 25 years. Photos/Kathryn Reed

**By Kathryn Reed**

Ray Lacey knew what job he wanted to have before it even existed. Now, after 25 years with the California Tahoe Conservancy, the deputy director is calling it quits.

Lacey earned an undergraduate and graduate degree from UC Berkeley and then a graduate degree in watershed planning from UC Davis. While at Davis he described the job he wanted to his advisor. That person informed him it didn't exist. Five years later it did with the Conservancy.

The 58-year-old attended his last board meeting on Thursday – at least as a full-time employee. The South Shore resident isn't going anywhere, so the board has said he will be tapped as a resource to train his successor and to work on projects. But officially his status as a regular employee ends latter this month.

“I think of myself as a community planner from an environment perspective. I tried to take the social and human interest as

well and not just the ecological perspective,” Lacey told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This is not a preserve or reserve. This is a living, breathing community.”

Now he’ll be spending more time with family – his mom is 104, and traveling.

“I always thought of him as being the ideal employee. He has never not done what he was supposed to do. He never makes a mistake, always does what he says he’s going to, and is always on time. He’s the perfect person,” Larry Sevinson, chair of the CTC board, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “He has also been a friend to everybody. No matter what I throw at him he gets it resolved.”

Lacey’s fingerprints are on most of the Conservancy’s projects in the basin. But he describes what he does as putting the icing on the cake; that it was others who are not always recognized and the land acquisition folks who deserve credit for providing him a canvas to transform.

“His legacy is working with Tahoe City Public Utility District on Commons Beach and Lakeview Commons on the South Shore. They have become community gathering places largely because of his work,” Patrick Wright, CTC executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Community has been Lacey’s focus from Day 1 and continues to be. (The Conservancy was formed in 1984 and Lacey joined it in 1989.) His approach to projects has been to strive for the greater good – especially knowing it is taxpayer dollars that is paying for whatever improvements are being made.

He said listening to constituents is key to getting community projects in the ground.

Lacey reflected back on how in the 1980s Kings Beach was trying to figure out what to do with lakefront property. A common goal is to put things by the water that could not be

put elsewhere. So when people wanted a basketball court the Conservancy's thinking was this could go elsewhere. But meeting after meeting young people voiced the desire for the basketball court. That court got built. A few years later he went by it and some young men were playing. It was in good shape. No graffiti or vandalism. They told him they were going to take care of it and did; and they thanked him for making their dream become a reality.

"That's the power of listening to your constituency," Lacey said.

Listening is one of the traits Lacey is known for – as well as having a vision.



Ray Lacey, center, at the groundbreaking of Lakeview Commons with Jerry Birdwell, from left, Bruce Grego, Kathay Lovell and Norma Santiago.

"He is insightful and very diplomatic. He has Conservancy in his blood and always will," Bruce Eisner, longtime Conservancy employee, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He's always been someone people can talk to within the agency. He listens to what you have to say. People will miss that."

He also joked how Lacey has always been better dressed than

everyone else.

“Ray always set a dress standard the rest of us could only dream about ... double and triple starched shirts. I’m sure John’s Cleaners will miss him as much as us,” Eisner said with a laugh.

At the Sept. 18 board meeting others also commented on the dapper Lacey.

Another thing he is known for is taking fabulous vacations. He’ll be doing that again as soon as he becomes a retiree. He’s headed for Spain.

“I admire his work ethic and diplomacy. But I also admire his long vacations. When he got away, he got away,” Cindy Gustafson said.

Gustafson, who is executive director of the Tahoe City Public Utility District, has worked with Lacey since the late 1980s when she was a planner with Placer County. She credits him for helping to bring \$16 million in CTC funds to the TCPUD and another nearly \$5 million in other state funding. Bike trails, river access, Commons Beach, and the 64-acres are the bigger projects on the North Shore that Lacey had a part in.

Lacey has a knack for getting people to envision an idea for a parcel they would have never imagined. Such was the case when he took then CTC members Kathay Lovell and Norma Santiago to see what he and Gustafson had created with Commons Beach in Tahoe City. They were convinced something similar could be done with El Dorado Beach.

“That epitomizes that you can do projects for enormous good, but are all about community,” Lacey said.

That’s not to say it was always easy to get things accomplished, especially in such a heavily regulated area like the Lake Tahoe Basin.



Ray Lacey speaking to a community group about Conservancy issues.

“He always managed to see the positive side. It was evident this was not a job for him. He truly loves Lake Tahoe and he wanted to do everything possible to enhance the ability for people to recreate in Lake Tahoe on the California side,” said Lovell, who spent six of her eight years as a South Lake Tahoe City Council member on the CTC board.

Gustafson said Lacey has an ability to listen to everyone’s concerns, be diplomatic, always be professional, problem-solve and build consensus, which made him stand out above others.

“He was always able to work through issues with folks and gain their respect, maybe not agreement,” Gustafson told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I never saw anyone walk away and be hurt by Ray.”

Through the years Lacey has had other job offers. But Tahoe has been in his blood since he was a young man, spending as much time during high school and college as he could at the lake. His college work also centered on Lake Tahoe. But more important to him is that sense of community. He doesn’t believe it’s possible to effect change without understanding the fabric of a community. That’s why community comes before environmental planning for him.

“You need to know how the community works, to have the pulse of it, and know what makes people feel connected to their

environment,” Lacey said.