

Douglas County manager ready to lead



Jim Nichols began his tenure as Douglas County manager on Sept. 29. Photo/Provided

Jim Nichols is finishing his third week as manager of Douglas County. He replaces Steve Mokrohisky who left in April for a job in Oregon.

Nichols was one of 72 applicants for the job. Most recently he was assistant city manager for Midland, Texas. He will be making \$172,000 a year.

Lake Tahoe News caught up with him for a quick Q&A.

LTN: Since you are new to Northern Nevada, how do you expect to get up to speed? What few things are you focusing on first – besides learning everyone's name?

Nichols: I am getting up to speed on Northern Nevada in a variety of ways. First, I am relying upon the insight of my staff who are all very familiar with the region. They are informing me of the issues of significance. Our commissioners are also providing me with valuable feedback on the county.

In addition, I am meeting with various community leaders,

stakeholders and county partners to learn their priorities and the needs of the region.

Finally, I am trying to get out into the community so I can meet with residents and see the county firsthand and learn about everything we have to offer.

LTN: What do you see as the biggest problem dividing the lake and the valley, and how do you expect to fix it?

Nichols: I don't really see there being a "problem" dividing the lake and the valley. We are one county and one community all focused on continued prosperity. The only real disconnect between these two distinct parts of our community is distance.

However, as long as we respect and appreciate the unique aspects of each area that make them so important to Douglas County, there really shouldn't be any problem dividing them.

LTN: Water is a growing issue in Nevada now that we just started year four of the drought. At the lake the issues center on potable water and recreation. In the valley potable water and ranching are the issues. What is your approach to managing water and what should be done that isn't being done?

Nichols: I'm still being brought up to speed on the water situation in Douglas County so I don't have all of the information on everything being done to address our current and future water needs. However, having recently worked in Texas during a prolonged drought affords me some perspective on dealing with Douglas County's water situation. Fundamentally, I believe in looking at a community's water from a regional perspective. When we become too focused on only our needs and concerns, we lose sight of potential opportunities and solutions that may exist just outside our borders.

LTN: You were living in Henderson when you moved to Douglas County and were last working in Texas. What were you doing

when you weren't employed, how long were you unemployed and why did you leave that job?

Nichols: Over the past year, I began to pursue executive-level positions that would have been a natural extension and progression in my career. I had served as a deputy-assistant city manager for nine years and was ready to lead an organization. I had advised my city manager of my intentions and had his full support on my career pursuits. However, earlier this year, my job interviews became public knowledge in the community and had the potential of becoming a distraction for my previous employer. Therefore, I decided it was best that I leave for the good of the organization. I left Midland in March with several job opportunities on the horizon. Unfortunately, none of them materialized. I remained in Henderson to oversee a rental property that I still own in the area while seeking a new position. I learned of the Douglas County manager opportunity and applied for it. I feel very fortunate to have been selected and am happy to call Douglas County my new home.

LTN: What in your background points to being to deal with how heavily regulated Lake Tahoe is?

Nichols: My applicable background related to Lake Tahoe goes back to my time as public works director/city engineer of Chehalis, Wash. During my time with the city, the Chehalis River was regulated by a TMDL. During my 5½ years of service with the city of Chehalis, I worked with the state's environmental regulatory agency (DEP) regarding our wastewater treatment plant and specifically our discharge into the Chehalis River. I became well versed in the issues and intricacies associated with total maximum daily loads and feel comfortable in working on the regulatory needs of Lake Tahoe.

LTN: What is your opinion of the proposed realignment of Highway 50 at the lake – better known as the loop road?

Nichols: I am still getting up to speed on the U.S. 50/South Shore Community Revitalization Project and feel it would be premature for me to comment on it at this time.

LTN: Suppose you get to seek counsel with five Nevadans (or those who lived in the Silver State at one time) to dinner (living or dead), who would you summon and why?

Nichols: Wow – excellent question. I’ve never been asked that before. I would say that my five Nevadans to dine with would be: Donald Bently (because of the profound impact he’s had on Douglas County); Gov. Brian Sandoval (to learn his vision for the future of Nevada); Snowshoe Thompson (because of the important role he played in the history of Douglas County); Andre Agassi (to learn where he gets his competitive spirit); and Mark Twain (to learn the source of his wit and wisdom).

LTN: You’ve written a couple books, do you think you would write one out of your experiences in county-city manager offices? If so, can we get a sneak peek?

Nichols: Thank you for even taking note of my prior books. I do think a book that looks at city/county management and maybe even compares and contrasts the two would be an interesting subject. If I write another one (which I would love to do, as time allows), I will gladly offer you a sneak preview.

LTN: Where will we find you recreating in Lake Tahoe?

Nichols: I can be found anywhere that has a bike path or hiking trail. I am an avid bicycle enthusiast and hope to be able to take my bike to the lake regularly to enjoy the scenic views. I also enjoy hiking and hope to hike around the lake from time to time.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*