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Lafayette Citizen of the Year John Coleman honored for decades of service in Lafayette

By Sharon K. Sobotta



John Coleman Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

John Coleman is one of those people who has never taken commitment or service lightly. Earlier this year, Coleman wrapped up more than three decades of service with the East Bay Municipal Utility District, making him the longest serving elected EBMUD Board Member. This summer, Coleman will partake in his 56th consecutive year of Boy Scout camp. He is also a committed husband, father, grandfather, and role model to many. This is perhaps why well over 100 people gathered at the Lafayette Park Hotel to honor and celebrate Coleman as the citizen of the year on March 28.

"You're probably one of the most deserving citizens of the year that the city has ever seen," Mike Anderson, the 2023 Lafayette Citizen of the year, told Coleman. "It's not so much about the policy but it's the heart and soul in the ground, doing the work, talking to people, dealing with the kids (in Boy Scouts)."

Coleman's wife beamed with pride as she spoke about her husband with the couple's grandchildren by her side. "John frequently jokes that the only time people get to hear good things about themselves is at their memorial service," she said. "And this is so much better." She gave a glimpse of life with John Coleman, describing him as a morning person who can offer the weather forecast before 6 a.m., and who even conserves water with limiting his at home flushes.

Coleman was presented with a sash early in the evening, and speakers and presenters added their pins and patches of recognition to it throughout the evening. Coleman cheekily poked fun at parts of the scouting uniform he refused to embrace, sashes included, but thanked the organization for giving him far more than he credits himself offering in return.

In receiving his award, Coleman expressed gratitude for each of his community and professional endeavors. "I've had a great time working and being on the board with East Bay MUD for 33+ years, the Bay Planning Coalition for 11 years, (and) the California Technology Fund," Coleman said while going through his laundry list of involvement. "But having you here-friends, family, and community members, is awesome."

Coleman also returned the accolades his wife offered, earning a round of applause when he revealed that he proposed to her at a Lafayette Chamber event.

While Coleman had the crowd laughing for a good share of the evening, he seemed to touch hearts when he shared a recent discovery regarding a trait he has common with his grandson - they're both on the autism spectrum.

"When I found out my grandson was on the spectrum and I read about it, it made sense," he said, before discussing his own diagnosis - which he received three years prior - in an effort to destigmatize autism and neurodivergence. "I can identify much more with people who have challenges. A lot of my work going forward will be in supporting people who live with and manage challenges-whether, they be neurodivergent or another kind of challenge."

Coleman said his own diagnosis and the education that's come along with it has allowed him to relate to a broader swath of people and offered a public service announcement. "If you know someone who has a challenge, embrace it. Don't look down on others, because you may not know what's going on in their lives. It's important that they be able to do things and be able to move forward in their lives as much as anyone else."

Dan Rogers is the father of boy scouts, and came to know Coleman through his leadership of troop 243. "John is an inspiration to us as scouts and as community members, and it's an honor to be here celebrating his contributions to Lafayette tonight," Rogers said. "The most amazing thing is when you hear about the initiatives that John has undertaken in the community-how they've transformed the community in ways that our families don't even know and recognize. Whether you're sitting at a concert or noticing the trees in

downtown Lafayette (which Coleman's efforts helped bring to fruition), the contributions he's made to the community are limitless."

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[back](#)

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