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Meet Mike Segrest, Moraga's New Town Manager

By *Sophie Braccini*



Mike Segrest Photo Sophie Braccini

Mike Segrest, Moraga's new Town Manager, has the face and experience of a seasoned sailor. If sailing is a metaphor for life, Segrest has helped captain the helm of several town governments as well as skippering his own boat in the Caribbean. Through both calm and turbulent waters, Segrest brings an impressive list of accomplishments to the Town of Moraga. The challenges in our fair town are a contest for any captain, and how Segrest will maneuver through our own sea of opportunities remains to be seen.

Segrest started his career as a landscape architect and town planner in Austin, Texas. Working in Austin, Segrest gained valuable experience working on open space development projects such as Town Lake, a large body of water surrounded by public parks and recreation facilities. Later, he moved to Boulder Colorado where, as the Town's Parks and Recreation Director, he developed and managed a number of local recreation projects. His success in managing Parks and Recreation ultimately led him to the role of Boulder's Assistant Town Manager. As the Director of Community Services in Lakewood Colorado, Segrest participated in a number of high profile development projects including a new community golf course. Feeling the pull of the sea, he took a two-year sabbatical to sail the Caribbean Islands with his wife, Debbie. He returned to Colorado as the Town Manager of Snowmass Village, a small ski resort that was suffering from chronic deficits and a community development plan that had been on the drawing board for twenty years. "The challenge at Snowmass was to create a consensus that would work for the town, the developer and the public," recalls Segrest.

A town manager has to work with people and organizations that see things from many different perspectives. "It is more interesting to deal with different opinions," he says, that's how creative solutions emerge." At Snowmass, it took work, negotiations and a referendum to finally approve the mixed-use development that Segrest was hired to bring to fruition. Part of the challenge was getting local residents on board. "With any change comes a certain degree of uncertainty," admits Segrest, "some are afraid to lose their quality of life; the issues of traffic impact, esthetics always come to the forefront." Segrest sees his role as bridging the gap between what the community can embrace and what the developers find interesting. For example, he believes that affordable housing in Moraga is a necessity to conform to our State mandate, but that the quality and the appropriateness of the location are key to properly integrating it into the fabric

of the town.

"The economic situation we're in has one positive aspect," says Segrest about Moraga's state of affairs, "a down-turn is a good time to plan and get ready for when the cycle starts again."

He believes that the town has a lot of untapped potential and that the specific plans for both the Moraga and Rheem Centers can put the town on track to a more healthy revenue path. "The key to a development plan is to understand where your market is and the realistic potential of any given situation," believes Segrest. He thinks that the small number of property owners in Moraga is an asset to defining a solid path forward.

Segrest is now in the process of getting to know his diverse constituency and the financial challenges that face the Town. "That's where it all begins, the budget," he says, "it's truly where you set your priorities."

When he arrived at Snowmass, Segrest says, the town had been in the red for three years and he turned the situation around in one year. "We examined our expenses, the allocation and structure of the finances and the revenue side and we were able to make the necessary adjustments." It's too early for him to make an assessment of Moraga's financial situation and the Town's goal setting meeting, scheduled for the first week of May, should provide a good forum for communicating how he plans to navigate financial priorities.

"I am looking forward to working with the new Revenue Enhancement Committee as well," says Segrest. Over all, Segrest is optimistic about the future of Moraga. "There is a lot of untapped potential in this pretty town," he says, "it could even become a mini destination where people would come for dinner and walk around town, attracted by the charm of the destination." But at this point, the new Town Manager is dedicating his time to more clearly understanding Moraga's unique position and aspirations for the future.

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