

Conversations with Alumni

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Currently, I am a Principal at HMH Engineers, a San Jose based Land Use Planning, Civil Engineering, Landscape Architecture and Surveying Company. I have also had the honor of serving as the Chair of Cal Poly's City and Regional Planning Advisory Council (CiRPAC) for the past two years.

Over my 37-year career, I have managed to stay in love with my profession and enjoyed time in both the public and private sectors. My first job out of school was a Planning Intern position with the City of Palo Alto in the fall of 1981. I recall sitting in the Planning Department Lobby, waiting an hour for the chance to talk to the Planning Director and convince him that he should hire me as an intern. My experience in Palo Alto was invaluable in that I learned from the ground level all the tasks that went into the public planning office. From working at the Public Information Counter to preparing public notices and processing Architectural Review Board applications, my Cal Poly "learn by doing" education was extremely relevant as I was required to complete many tasks with "on the job" training. I spent 3 ½ educational years in Palo Alto.

My next stop was Planner II position with the City of San Jose in 1985. San Jose was quite a change from the City of Palo Alto. It was the "big city". During the mid-1980's the City was growing rapidly, the Downtown was beginning its transformation aided by redevelopment funds that help to build the Fairmont Hotel and the San Jose Arena. The North San Jose Industrial Park was also growing rapidly with companies like Cisco Systems, Sony and Hitachi Data Systems. Learning San Jose geographically was a challenge and learning the idiosyncrasies of City Hall was equally as challenging. I would estimate that it took at least a year to learn the geographic districts of the city and the same amount of time to learn the City Hall protocol. The most important lesson I learned at San Jose was that it paid dividends to take initiative and build your network of contacts within city hall to assist you in moving your projects through the review process. I spent almost 10 years at the City of San Jose, 5 of those years as a supervising Senior Planner, all in the implementation/current planning. The work was rewarding as I saw a great many of my projects approved and built in a relatively short period.



My move to the private sector occurred in 1994 with JM Consulting Group. I was swept up in the telecom wave that saw many telecommunication companies like GTE Mobilnet and Cellular One that were building new networks cell sites to serve the exploding demand for cellular telephones. JM Consulting provided real estate, entitlement and construction services. This work was interesting at first as we were charged with securing leases, entitlements and constructing of cellular antenna sites all over Central and Northern California. In the end, the static issues for every project (aesthetics and potential

health concerns) made the work somewhat mundane after a couple of years. However, career-building skills that I learned with this job were: the importance of client care, project budgeting, construction issues, and most importantly creating a network planning profession contacts in many jurisdictions throughout the state.

In 1998 I joined HMH Engineers and spent one year there until I was recruited to be the Assistant Planning Official and Zoning Administrator back in Palo Alto. As it turned out, my return to the public sector taught me that I was no longer interested in being on the regulatory end of planning anymore. After one year back in Palo Alto I returned to HMH Engineers in 2000 and have been there ever since. I have been fortunate to be part of an ownership group at HMH and continue to provide entitlement consultation to our broad client base in the Bay Area.

There is no question that my education at Cal Poly opened career doors for me, gave me confidence, and provided me with a skill set to be successful. What I believe that you need to add to that skill set is the initiative to learn on the job and take on as many challenges that present themselves to you. Beyond that, personal communication and building a network of clients, design professionals, and agency staff is a must in our profession. I have maintained contact with many of my CRP classmates from 1981 who are an integral part of my professional network.

