



News Release

South Tahoe Public Utility District
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Remembering Director Jim Jones

South Lake Tahoe, CA (May 15, 2020) – On May 7, 2020, South Lake Tahoe lost a steadfast advocate for safe, clean drinking water and reliable wastewater services. James R. Jones, a local engineer and avid sailor, served on South Tahoe Public Utility District’s Board of Directors for 39 years (1977-1989, 1993-2020). During his tenure on the Board, Director Jones focused on building for the future, instead of ‘kicking the can down the road.’

“No one can rival Jim’s dedication to the District, both in length of service and depth of engagement on water and wastewater issues,” says John Thiel, General Manager for South Tahoe Public Utility District. “Jim’s unwavering commitment to replace aging infrastructure and increase the reliability of our water and sewer systems will benefit our community for decades to come.”

When Director Jones started at the District in the late 1970s, the sewer system was in dire straits. Sewer spills were a common occurrence and serious investments were needed to protect Lake Tahoe. Jones spearheaded efforts to secure grant funding to re-asses wastewater treatment options. This initiative led to upgrading the treatment plant and eventually led to the District’s recognition by the Environmental Protection Agency as wastewater treatment plant of the year in both 1994 and 2001.

“Jim was a strong advocate to ensure the integrity of our water and sewer delivery systems,” says Randy Vogelgesang, Board President. “He passionately served the District and his guidance helped build the reliable system that we have today.”

Director Jones was instrumental in protecting South Lake Tahoe’s water quality when gas stations contaminated groundwater with MTBE in the late 1990s. During a lawsuit against big oil companies, Jones testified for the District, met with Congress, and served on the Environmental Protection Agency’s Blue Ribbon Committee to ensure MTBE polluters paid to clean up the mess. Through his efforts, the District received more than \$70 million dollars in lawsuits and settlements, which set a precedent nationwide for oil companies to fund clean-up measures.

Prior to owning his own engineering firm in South Lake Tahoe, Jones fought fires with the U.S. Forest Service, inspected wastewater treatment plants for the Environmental Protection Agency and Bureau of Reclamation, and was a self-professed ski bum for a few years. Through his past experiences, Jones had a unique understanding of the link between forest management, water quality, and fire suppression. Prior to his death, Jones was working on a statewide initiative highlighting the importance of headwater issues on California’s water supply.



Director Jones made frequent trips to Sacramento and Washington, DC to lobby for infrastructure funding. During his tenure on the Board, the District successfully lobbied for millions in grant funds to build a recycled water system, upgrade the wastewater treatment, drill new wells, and increase South Lake Tahoe's ability to fight wildfire. He worked closely with the Association of California Water Agencies, California Association of Sanitation Agencies, and El Dorado County Water District and his loss will be felt by industry partners statewide.

"Jim will be remembered for his lifelong curiosity for science and engineering, connecting people with complex issues, and fighting to do the right thing for our community," said General Manager Thiel. "He was a dedicated public servant and will be dearly missed."

A Resolution recognizing Director Jim Jones' 39 years of service will be adopted during South Tahoe Public Utility District's Board Meeting on May 21.