



## Desert Healthcare District Director reflects on 18 years of service

Kay Hazen discusses the value of expansive thinking and investing in outcomes in community service

### *Staff Report*

For more than 30 years, Kay Hazen has deftly imbued her career with unwavering community service, and vice versa.

She arrived in 1987 from the Midwest to Palm Springs, recruited for a marketing and administrative job with Desert Hospital (now Desert Regional Medical Center). The skills she had developed in innovative radio and television programs at Blackhawk College in Moline, Illinois, as well as earlier jobs in healthcare, made her an ideal choice.

By the time she left the hospital in 1992, she had risen through the ranks to become vice president of outpatient services. She was also active in the community, holding a variety of volunteer leadership roles with the Palm Springs International Film Festival, Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce, American Heart Association Desert Chapter and Friends of the Desert Mountains, among others. After eight years as Vice President of Government Affairs for Mine Reclamation Corporation, she started her own strategic marketing and communications firm, Kay Hazen & Company.

But healthcare advocacy would remain a passion in her life. In 2000, Hazen was appointed to serve as a Director on the Desert Healthcare District and Desert Healthcare Foundation Board. She made invaluable contributions to the health and wellness of Coachella Valley residents as a Director for 18 years. This year, Hazen's tenure on the Board ends, culminating with expressions of deep appreciation and collegial admiration from many elected and community leaders at the Board's November 27 meeting.

As she embarks on her next chapter, Hazen shares a few of the lessons she's learned, thoughts on the District's legacy and a single word of advice that would benefit just about anyone.



Kay Hazen. *Staff Photo*

**How are you feeling about the Desert Healthcare District's expansion measure passing?**

I think it's exciting. It's really a generational moment for the District. I think 10, 20 years from now people will look back and see it as the moment everything changed. The challenge ahead is in maximizing the potential opportunity.

**What do you see as the biggest challenge?**

Funding — the same challenge there has always been and will always be — until there is a sustainable source of funding to make the kind of changes in health status that are needed and that we've been working on for so long.

**Do you have a greatest accomplishment as part of the District Board?**

There were a lot of advancements, and certainly I would never presume to take any sort of credit for any of them. The beauty of the District Board is that it is a collective and that it represents the power of the people. I think trying to bring a level of expansion in thinking and impact is very much what I always tried to do. We're always reflective of our community, and I think that's something of which the entire District Board should be proud. The current atmosphere and climate is reflective of a change in the whole valley. That's a good thing, new voices coming to the table is a good thing. And I hope enhanced diversity in age and gender and demographics of all the variety — I mean it when I say it's "a generational moment."

**What were your first impressions of the community when you moved to Palm Springs in 1987?**

It was difficult. Because it felt so different. Because it was Southern California and [I came from] the Midwest. I learned over time that it really isn't that different. I mean, we were very progressive. I thought for sure I'd come out here and *we were so backward, I would have to catch up* — quite the opposite. We had done so many

things. We were very much advanced in our thinking and our activity. I was able immediately to bring some very good experiences to the table and [introduce] some very important activities, one of which was to integrate a fast track in the ER. We had done that years and years prior, things like that were good experiences to bring.

It was a difficult transition personally because there weren't a lot of young people here and not a lot of obvious things to do. But you know, it turned out to be an incredibly welcoming community; some things don't change, it's still that way. The desert wraps itself around you. There's everything you could ever want here. It's easy to fall in love with the desert. Obviously, I did.

**You've been involved with many organizations, the film festival, Friends of the Desert Mountains. What motivates you to get involved with a cause or organization?**

Most of those things happened because I was approached to get involved. And I have a hard time saying no. I've always been that way, I was raised that way. My mother was an active, community volunteer so it comes naturally to me, I don't even think about it.

I was very fortunate to chair the [Palm Springs International] Film Festival for two years, and be president of the chamber for two years, back to back. They were both at times when the organizations were in the midst of change.

**Was that during the time Sonny Bono was involved?**

Sonny Bono was so creative and so full of energy and passion. And a great friend to Desert Hospital. Look at what the festival has become — thanks to the continued leadership and support of Sonny, Ric and Rozene Supple, Harold Matzner, the city of Palm Springs and others. It is simply incredible — talk about collective impact. I couldn't be more impressed or thankful, and wish I could thank each and every one who has been involved for what has been accomplished. There are many people that were a part of it at the very beginning, holding it together, believing in the dream. And Sonny led the way, encouraging the city and others to invest, and to stick with it. His vision and leadership meant so much.

There's a lesson there for all of us, including the District— investing in the desired outcome, not expecting things to change overnight. They don't. You have to stick with it. It took more than 10 years working with Desert Hot Springs to turn a corner on access to care, but it was a great corner to turn. To move a community out of medically underserved status is an incredible accomplishment. And the greatest thing to me about it is, the community came together to make it happen. Darn near \$10 million worth of investment in that community, in people and process and

programs that resulted in a brand-new health and wellness facility, Boys and Girls Club and aquatic center, and increased access to healthcare for a community that was long underserved. These are major changes.

Same thing with the UCR Medical School, which we fought hard about and rightly so. What we were fighting for is assurance is that District investment would return in the form of [medical] residents and clinics and direct service to our [valley] residents, and that's what happened. We have residents in our hospital, a 14,000-square-foot clinic seeing hundreds and hundreds of patients and a great partnership with the medical school that continues to grow. Together, we have built upon that clinic to expand services to disenfranchised populations, a homeless clinic and street medicine, and all sorts of new services and access for our residents that are extensions of that early investment in the dream. Great success story.

### **What are you going to miss about being part of the District?**

Healthcare has been a part of my life for more than 40 years. I don't intend to stop now. While I certainly will miss the collegiality of working as a director with the Board and staff, I'll still be involved in other ways. I'm not going anywhere any time soon.

### **How would you say your time with the District has shaped you?**

It certainly has reinforced some values for me, which I think is what your experiences do. I like the whole process of hearing and learning from others. That's an aspect of the public process I respect and value. I may miss that — being so eyeball-to-eyeball with the public on a regular basis.

### **The District Board will soon welcome three new members. Do you have any advice for them?**

Listen.

## **A PARK WITH PURPOSE**

Kay Hazen often works behind the scenes, sometimes front and center, and always collaboratively. One of the most visible examples was the result of multiple partnerships, under the leadership of the District: the Wellness Park that opened in 2005 across the street from Desert Regional Medical Center and adjacent to Katherine Finchy Elementary School in Palm Springs.

"Walk over there any time and you will see people exercising on the fitness stations, walking and exercising," Hazen enthuses. "There are fitness classes, yoga

in the park, health-related events and exhibits. The park is busy with active people of all ages and sizes and that makes me very happy. The District purchased the property after the school district declared it surplus. And then Desert Water Agency, the city of Palm Springs, Palm Springs Unified School District and the healthcare district came together to create the Wellness Park - a piece of healthy infrastructure the public has embraced wholeheartedly. A park with a purpose. Built by a powerful partnership with a shared goal and a collective impact where everybody benefits.



A Wellness Park bench now bears a plaque recognizing Director Hazen's service and role in the creation of the park. *Photo courtesy of the Desert Healthcare District Staff*