

Starkey brings public safety and community mindsets to Board of Supervisors

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Valerie Starkey knew she wanted to go into law enforcement when she was just 12 years old.

Sitting in the California Highway Patrol office where her father worked, the sound of a teletype machine printing a rap sheet grabbed her attention and set her on a path to public service.

Within a few years, she'd become a police clerk, preparing rap sheets herself for the probation department. There was no looking back.

"It was so thrilling to me," Starkey said. "That was what I wanted to do, I loved to investigate things."

Now retired after a 30-year career as a parole officer, Starkey's taking on a new public service role representing District 2 on the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors. She hopes to couple her experience growing up locally and her time in law enforcement to serve the county.

Starkey grew up in Del Norte County, but moved to Sonoma County after high school. She retired from her public safety career in 2015 and returned to the area to be closer to family members.

“I’m going to draw a lot on my experiences as a probation officer,” Starkey said, adding that officers investigating crimes have to consider evidence from every possible angle. “I’m going to talk to the proponents of (an issue), the opponents of it, then research with the people who have done this before, and then look at the law and apply the ordinances and what not.”

Starkey has a number of issues she wants to see the county tackle.

“I have a list,” she said.

Among them, Starkey hopes to see youth in the community have options that may not include a four-year college.

“That’s what I think we need to make sure, especially in small communities, that we expose our youth to something that sparks their interest, and that they pursue it,” Starkey said. “[We] want them to be able to go and do that, but [we] want them to come back.”

Living-wage jobs in a variety of industries, as well as organizations, events and venues to give young people a chance to meet each other could make the community a more enticing place for youth to return to, Starkey said.

And it’s not just youth that Starkey wants to pay attention to. While on the board of supervisors, she hopes to use her public safety experience to make the community as safe as it was when she was growing up in it, especially for older residents who might be used to leaving their doors unlocked, for example.

“The people of this community need to realize that we’re not living in the 80s. We’re here now,” Starkey said. “I want this community to be as safe as it can.”

In the nearer term though, breaking through the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic is top of mind for Starkey, especially as local businesses face declining revenue and other challenges.

While state regulations limit what can be done in response to the virus, she said community members can make the best of the situation by shopping locally and pitching in to support area businesses.

“We have the option as the community to say ‘this is what we can do together,’” she said.

Capitalizing on Del Norte County’s community pride to come together and solve problems is how Starkey plans to respond to the county’s other challenges, too.

“My focus is really on what can I do to, number one, bring leadership, and number two, do what’s best for this community, whatever that looks like,” Starkey said. “That’s going to take all of us. I can’t say that I know for sure what’s best for this community.”

