

Short brings career in community to Del Norte board

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Del Norte County is home for Darrin Short.

Born in Crescent City, Short moved away for a few years to go to college. But after the time away, he knew he wanted to return to where he had family and friends.

“When I left to go to college, I was like ‘break off that rearview mirror because I’m not coming back here at all,’” Short said. “It was a youth-driven want to leave home, but I realized that we live in a beautiful, beautiful area and we wanted to come back.”

Short’s career path isn’t uncommon in Del Norte County: He worked a few years as a heavy equipment operator at Miller Redwood, until he got laid off. After that, he spent his career at the Pelican Bay State Prison, rising to the rank of captain before retiring a year and a half ago.

That path laid the foundation for much of how Short hopes to serve his home county representing District 1 on the Board of Supervisors.

On one hand, he's seen the economic challenges that area residents face, with family-wage jobs limited to a few sectors of industry.

"The mills shutting down, and seeing a big glut of locals moving to the prison – just like I did – it was kind of an eye-opener," Short said. "And now, seeing, 'hey what would be my options if I didn't go to the prison?' Well there's not a lot of them that would sustain you in a way that makes you able to raise a family."

His time at the prison also gave him an inside look at the realities of local law enforcement. He feels sheriff's deputies in the county are underpaid, which results in them leaving for higher-paying jobs after getting a few years of experience.

"They're underpaid to a point where we kind of have kind of a farm team," Short said. "That results in us having law enforcement officers with very little experience, and that is a disservice to the people of the county as well."

Short's also got insight on the community from a public safety lens. As a volunteer firefighter and battalion chief with the Crescent City Fire Department, he's seen homeless camps around the community.

"I know that we need work in that area, so I hope to further progress in making our homeless situation better," Short said.

He pointed to a few projects-in-progress that he's hopeful will make a positive impact on the county's homeless population, like the county's recent purchase of a Crescent City hotel for use as emergency housing.

Beyond that, Short also hopes to see the county continue to make progress in launching other projects on the issue. A transitional housing tiny home village in Medford, Oregon, could serve as a model for Del Norte County, he said.

Another corner of the county's budget he'd like to see improved is mental health services. The county is a "mental health desert," he said.

"A lot of our vacancies at the county department of health are in the mental health realm. And I would like to work toward fixing that," Short said. "Everything comes down to money of course, so I'd like to get our budget adjusted in such a way where we could attract some mental health professionals to our area."

Those issues, in addition to the county's continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, are complex, but Short hopes to use his experience from a term on the city council in Crescent City to work with the rest of the board of supervisors to find the right response.

"You can't do it by yourself," Short said. "We all get a lot more done for the people of the county when we work together."

