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FEATURED

New CEO selected at Healdsburg District Hospital

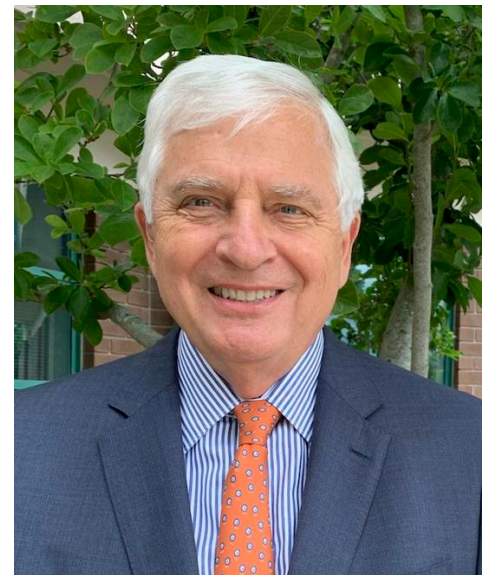
By Rollie Atkinson, Sonoma West Staff
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James Schuessler replacing the retiring Joe Harrington

With the expected retirement of current CEO Joseph Harrington announced in December, the board of the Healdsburg District Hospital (HDH) has secured his replacement as they continue to oversee the hospital's operations through the COVID-19 pandemic that has severely impacted normal operations. In a board vote earlier this month James Schuessler was offered and accepted the CEO position, which he assumed on May 11.

Harrington is leaving after a short three-year term that saw him navigate the community health institution through two wildfires, a community-wide evacuation and a weeklong power outage. His tenure also leaves behind the ongoing work by hospital leadership to forge a long-term agreement with a new strategic and management partner.

Schuessler has experience with health care system operations, strategic planning and physician practice management.



James Schuessler

“On several previous occasions, Mr. Schuessler’s expertise has been sought to navigate tumultuous situations for different health care institutions, and his calm manner of leadership helped to regain stability for hospitals in crises. He arrives at HDH in the midst of a global pandemic, as well as a pending

partnership with a major health care network, and his skills and expertise will be welcomed and called upon,” according to a District press release.

Healdsburg District Hospital is operated by the North Sonoma County Healthcare District and is led by a five-member board of directors who are elected by district voters in Healdsburg, Windsor, Cloverdale, Geyserville and unincorporated north county. The district was formed in 2001 and is partially funded by an annual parcel tax paid by all in-district property owners.

The small semi-rural hospital has faced several years of fiscal problems and has been seeking a larger strategic partner to help recruit physicians, provide more specialty services and add better economies of scale in costs and operations.

“We are very excited to bring Jim Schuessler aboard as our CEO. He comes highly recommended by a number of hospitals that he has served in the past. He has an extensive array of experience as a hospital CEO,” said James Nantell, board and selection committee member. “His knowledge and experience will be crucial assets as we continue to consider future opportunities.”

The board has expressed their trust in Schuessler’s abilities specifically in the areas of improved operations, financial planning as well as negotiating the path toward a merger with St. Joseph’s Health Northern California. He is relocating to the area from Fort Worth, Texas, Nantell added.

“We are grateful to Joe Harrington for his leadership and dedication over the last few years. He has successfully implemented new and improved systems, addressed financial problems and rebuilt the morale of our staff. His hard work has repositioned us on the path to financial stability, while inspiring us to achieve excellence in health care. He has led us through two devastating wildfires and now the global pandemic with steadfast leadership and total commitment to the organization. He has undeniably proven his many talents and reinforced the value he has brought to us and to our community. We will miss him, and wish he and his wife Joline a long, healthy and happy retirement here in Healdsburg,” said Board Chair Erin Gore.

Currently, the hospital is operating well below normal procedures, as it must remain on alert for any surge of local COVID-19 cases. Elective surgeries are being curtailed but the emergency room and Healdsburg Primary Care is operating at regular hours. Many of these patient services are now being conducted with telemedicine and under COVID-19 special procedures, as outlined by the Dr. Sundari Mase, the county's public health officer.
