

## The Signal

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### City Attracts 'Bright Leaders'

By Katherine Geyer  
Signal Staff Writer



Ken Striplin, 34, is the assistant city manager to City Manager Ken Pulskamp.



Lisa Hardy, 36, is the city's planning manager.



Cameron Smyth, 36, serves on the California Assembly.

policy is carried out.

Late October was quite a time for Ken Striplin's boss to be out of the country.

A 31-vehicle traffic collision ignited a deadly inferno inside a local truck tunnel and a week later, several wildfires ripped through the Santa Clarita Valley, forcing thousands to flee their homes.

And with City Manager Ken Pulskamp thousands of miles away, 34-year-old Striplin stepped in as acting city manager to direct the city staff and develop a disaster plan for each incident.

"In my various roles in the city over the years, I've dealt with floods, I've dealt with earthquakes, things of that nature," Striplin said. "But this really was my first opportunity in terms of being the acting city manager and the director of emergency services and really the main person."

Striplin is one of several 30-something leaders working to mold a now 20-something city.

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As the wildfires crept into the city, Striplin worked practically round the clock, setting up the emergency operations center and coordinating communication with local and national media outlets.

"With the fires in particular, there was just so much going on at one time that it wasn't what you might define as a typical disaster," he said. "There wasn't just one fire. You had four or five things going on."

Impressed with his quick response, the City Council voted in November to write him a letter of recommendation commending him on his response to the disasters.

Striplin began his career at the city as a management intern about 12 years ago. He moved up the ranks and after having seven different jobs at the city, was promoted to assistant city manager four years ago.

Striplin assists in managing and leading the day to day operations of the city, overseeing operational departments and ensuring City Council

After receiving a Master's in public administration from California State University, Northridge, the Palmdale native received a doctorate in organizational leadership from Pepperdine University.

And it is no surprise that his ultimate career goal is to become a city manager.

For a young leader like Striplin, Santa Clarita is the place to be.

"The thing that really hooked me about Santa Clarita is that it's a very dynamic community, which means we have a very dynamic organization. Things are changing; it's exciting," he said. "This organization has always been one that has looked for people who have kind of fit into those parameters, who are go-getters."

He said a young, growing city attracts energetic leaders who want to have a hand in molding a city.

"It's easy to look back over, even if you've only been here a short period of time, to point to a number of things you've had a hand in," he said. "You can accomplish a lot and not only are you impacting projects or solving issues, you're having a huge impact on the quality of life in a community for generations to come."

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At 36 years old, Lisa Hardy has an eye for the future and her job is to make sure the city has one, too.

The planning manager oversees all of the city's current planning projects, such as residential and commercial projects, and advanced planning operations, including the city's housing programs and long range general plans.

She has served as the planning manager for three of the nine years she has been with the city and now oversees a team of 20 planners.

Hardy grew up in Burbank and received a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Illinois.

She worked in Chicago and then in Pasadena for private sector firms, where her focus was in rail transportation and environmental planning.

And piecing together the puzzle of a young city is perhaps the ideal place for a planner to thrive, she said.

"It becomes a real passion, a real love. It's a big responsibility. You not only affect the lives of the people who are here in the community, but we're planning for generations to come," Hardy said. "You go to an older, more built-out community and you don't get the opportunities to work on annexations or environmental issues or growth issues and redevelopment. Those things are really unique to Santa Clarita and really offer a lot of opportunities for planners."

In turn, ambitious leaders help the city as well.

"In this community, we are so progressive and creative in our decision-making and really effecting change and making things happen for the better," she said. "I think that you find that through young, enthusiastic, ambitious staff members who are really looking to grow in their careers and give it their

all ... We're really trying to take advantage of the enthusiasm and creativity and the risk-taking of people who are earlier in their careers."

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Like other freshmen serving in the California Assembly, 36-year-old Cameron Smyth was bullied a bit when it came to the race to get bills to the governor's desk.

"As soon as we were sworn in, we saw a flurry of freshmen introducing legislation, but you didn't see a lot of veteran members do that," Smyth said.

Later, he saw senior legislators introduce bills that looked "eerily similar" to what was introduced by the freshmen members and introduced them just before the deadline when no one has a chance to copy them.

"What I did see was that more veteran members had more institutional knowledge of the process and at times used that parliamentary knowledge to either their advantage or the disadvantage of somebody else."

Smyth introduced 15 bills throughout the year and three became law.

After graduating from college, the Republican and Santa Clarita native worked as the chief of staff for state Sen. William "Pete" Knight.

Beginning at age 28, Smyth served for six years on the Santa Clarita City Council and was elected to serve as the first Santa Clarita native to represent the 38th district, which includes Santa Clarita, Simi Valley, Glendale and parts of the city of Los Angeles.

Smyth said that Santa Clarita fosters young leaders like himself.

"I think the attitude of Santa Clarita attracts young leaders," Smyth said. "I think the demographics of Santa Clarita lend to that. The average age in the city is in the low to mid 30s. It's a great place to raise a family and send your kids to school. So when people have an opportunity, they take advantage of it."

He also said that a new generation of staff brings new management styles and workplace attitudes, which allows for more influence from the younger generation.

"It's a different mindset now in the workplace from babyboomers to 'Gen Xers.'" he said. "I think Santa Clarita public and private sectors have embraced those and that serves to attract the brightest employees."

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