Steve Klein Waves Goodbye

PUD CEO/General Manager will retire on May 1

When Steve Klein was hired as the PUD’s General Manager in 2006, he didn’t expect to stay beyond the length of his five-year contract. Steve recently informed the Board of Commissioners that he’ll retire from the utility on May 1 – nine years after signing that first contract.

“When the Board asked me to consider a second contract, I told them I might not make it the full five years,” he said. “Still, this was a very hard decision.” Part of the impetus has to do with family timing. One of Steve’s two daughters (he and his wife also have a son) is about to graduate from Creighton University with a doctorate in physical therapy. “The more I thought about it, the more I thought maybe this would be a good time to make the break.”

The strong state of the utility also made it a good time to turn the page and begin the next chapter of his professional life. “If I did my job right, my leaving should have little impact going forward,” he said. Maybe so, but Steve’s impact on the PUD, and the industry, has been tremendous.

“The PUD has benefitted greatly from having such a highly regarded and skilled manager,” Board President Kathy Vaughn said. “The energy industry has become increasingly complex, and Steve’s forward-thinking vision has been central to our success.”

The Commissioners plan to conduct an internal and external search for the next CEO/General Manager. (continued)
If needed, the Board will appoint an interim General Manager before May 1.

Steve came to the PUD from Tacoma Power, where he had worked for 28 years, including 13 years at the helm. At the time, the PUD was still working to recover from the Enron ordeal. Addressing that challenge, and what it had done to employee morale, was Steve’s first order of business.

Snohomish County was in a robust growth mode at the time, and Steve knew he needed to chart a positive path for the utility. “We said ‘Hey, we’re in this business to serve our customers, and we’re going to be here for a long time. We need to start thinking long-term.”

Maintenance that had been deferred during the legal fights surrounding the Enron ordeal and West Coast energy crisis began being addressed. Partnerships were pursued to explore new technologies and renewable energy sources.

“I applaud Steve Klein for introducing cutting edge technology to help drive our region’s clean energy economy,” Gov. Jay Inslee said. “He is a proven innovator, positioning Snohomish County PUD as a true leader and setting the standard for other utilities throughout the country.”

Leading the utility out of one of its more challenging chapters, and helping to build its current regional, national and global reputation is among Steve’s proudest accomplishments. “We’ve also been able to attract some outstanding people to join us at all levels of the organization. I feel really good about that.”

And it’s the people he’ll miss the most. “I value everybody’s contribution,” he said. “Part of that is because I’ve been in the industry so long and come from a blue-collar background. In some way or another, I’ve done most of the jobs that people do here.”

“I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to everybody,” he added. “Their contribution has been important for putting the utility in the position it’s in today and its successes. I really appreciate those contributions.”

If you know Steve, you know that he’s not entering “retirement” in the traditional sense. He’ll soon be ready for his next challenge. Don’t be surprised to see him continuing to play a leadership role in clean tech, clean energy or energy policy. After all, he’s not really “retiring” — he’s just turning a page.

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David Kaplan of 1Energy, Steve Klein and Governor Jay Inslee at the PUD’s energy storage event in January.