

County DIGEST



FEBRUARY 15, 1996

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

Cover Story

GORDON ANTHONY: Designated Hitter for County's Disabled

Growing up, Gordon Anthony had an idyllic youth. Like many young boys growing up in the sixties, he spent his spare time collecting comic books, selling candy for charities, and playing baseball. In fact, Anthony was a star athlete in high school and dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player.

His dreams were frozen in time when life threw him a curve ball at the young age of 16. A sudden car accident resulted in a paralyzing spinal cord injury that now required him to use a wheelchair for mobility. He was faced with the reality that life would be different from now on. Due to his disability, he would be denied basic opportunities.

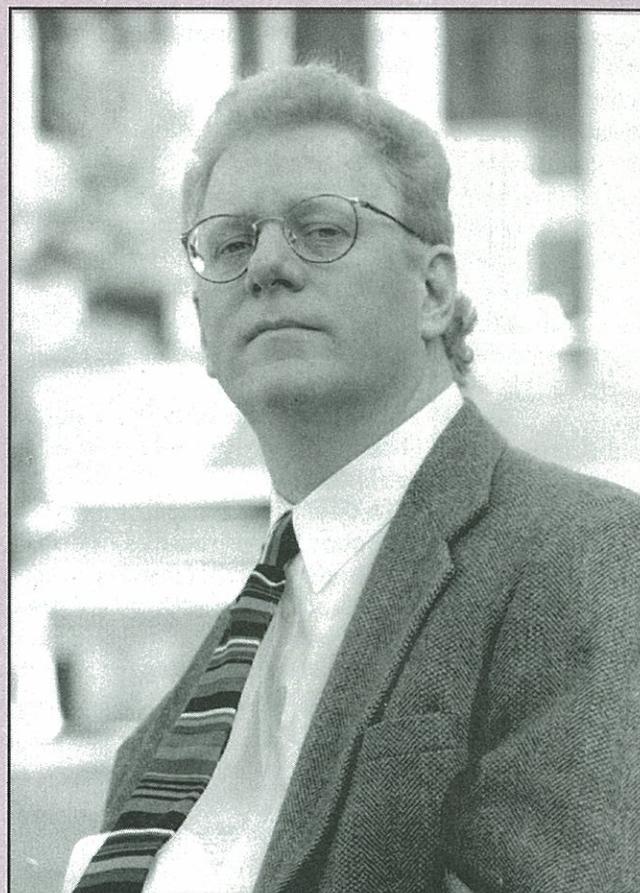
"I was shocked by how people perceived me and treated me," says Anthony. "I never wanted pity; I simply wanted to continue contributing, but it was so difficult to achieve due to barriers and people's attitudes. It was obstacle after obstacle. There were no laws in 1972 protecting people with disabilities from discrimination. I just didn't have any options about where to go to college, where to live, where to go to the movies — access and equality just didn't exist."

Not wanting to offend people, Anthony's advocacy efforts for himself and others were soft at first. Soon, though, he began to see the difference between ignorance and prejudice. One night while out on the town at a local night club, the owner told him to leave because he felt that Anthony's wheelchair was making other customers feel uncomfortable. Movie theater managers even called him a "fire hazard" because they believed his wheelchair took up too much space in the aisleway. Trying to attend a baseball game became a nightmare, with no access seating for spectators in wheelchairs. Frustrated and feeling alone, his determination of spirit and commitment to civil

rights grew out of his dismay at society's reactions to people with disabilities.

A quarter of a century later, Anthony's living a new sort of dream, one that will bring equality to persons with disabilities living and working in Los Angeles County. As the County's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance Coordinator, Anthony's job is to remove barriers and obstacles in the way of people with disabilities, literally and figuratively.

Hired in January 1995, Anthony's mission was to spend the first year getting the ADA compliance program up and running. He identified potential problems, policies that needed to be revised, training needs, and guidelines



ADA Compliance Coordinator Gordon Anthony

that required development. His responsibilities included investigating individual complaints of discrimination, providing technical assistance to employees and departments on how to ensure compliance, and developing liaisons with the disability community. He initiated training programs for a County workforce which had limited knowledge of the building codes for people with disabilities, reasonable accommodation, and methods for providing equal access to services and jobs.

One year later, Anthony's task is still daunting. By June 1996, Anthony is targeting completion of the County's

See "Anthony," page two

ANTHONY

continued from page one

Transition Plan in preparation for public comment. It will include how and when architectural and communication barriers will be removed from the public buildings within the County's 5,224 facilities. Anthony's office is filled with binders full of completed accessibility surveys from County departments. Each of the surveys contains architectural renderings and lists access deficiencies for each building, such as where wider doors are required, ramps need to be constructed, and audible signals for elevator operation need to be installed.

Daily, a computer printout of remaining barriers reminds him of the looming task. So far, only 1,700 of the County facilities have been surveyed, at an average cost of \$1,500 each.

"The magnitude of the problem is overwhelming," admits Anthony, citing the County's recent budget deficit as a major obstacle in the Plan's implementation. "We're fighting against the clock, questionable data and a lack of resources to correct these problems. Any one of my projects would be a full-time job, and each of the tasks is essential." Anthony notes that many people don't realize these barriers are discriminatory.

"Being forced through a separate entry or being denied access to a service due to a physical or communication barrier is discrimination. The landmark 1954 civil rights case, *Brown v.*

Board of Education, proved that separate is **not** equal, but 40 years later, people with disabilities are still fighting to simply get into buildings," he explains.

In one short year, Anthony's challenges have just begun, just as the ADA was fifteen years in the making. Finally made into federal law in 1990, Anthony personally experienced the moment when it became law in Washington, D.C.

"When I sat on the lawn of the White House and President Bush signed the ADA, I really for the first time since becoming disabled felt accepted into society, equal in society. It was an overwhelmingly emotional experience, sitting there with over 3,000 people with disabilities, who had been working so hard for years, listening to the President of the

United States talk about breaking down the walls of discrimination," he recalled. "I want to bring that feeling to County employees with disabilities and to people with disabilities who receive County services. We're all part of the diverse quilt of American life and people with disabilities deserve the right to participate and contribute equally."

Editor's Note:

The Affirmative Action Compliance Office/ADA Unit has been charged with the responsibility to ensure that the County of Los Angeles complies with the ADA and all state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities, and to take affirmative steps to ensure equal access and opportunity to employment, contracting, programs, and services. For more information, call (213) 974-1275, or (213) 974-0911(TDD).

The County's ADA Agenda:

- to educate County management on ADA issues;
- to develop more disability awareness and ADA training for County employees;
- to create a self-evaluation plan to ensure that the County's policies and practices do not discriminate;
- to complete an accurate Transition Plan to guarantee equal access to services for disabled members of the public;
- to ensure reasonable accommodation for County employees with disabilities;
- to design and monitor an effective process for Affirmative Action Compliance by which recruitment of qualified candidates with disabilities occurs, and
- to form the County's first "Employees With Disabilities Association."

This Month's Retirees

Congratulations to the following employees who have joined the ranks of the retired, after 30 years of service to the people of Los Angeles County.

Children and Family Services: Audrey M. Brown, Patricia A. Phillips

Community and Senior Services: Walker Peterson

Fire: Ted F. Clair, Gerald E. Frame, Ronald L. Mathis, Dennis H. Pearson, Paul H. Rippens, Don Rohrer, Steven D. Rummler

Health Services: Shirley Anderson, Oretha Armstrong, Lilian Blanchard, Ruth Brunings, Shirley M. Carlock, Colleen J. Colson, Dorothy Cuellar, Maria F. De Guzman, Lorenzo Gallardo, Opal Graham, Carrie M. Hammond, Clara La Crue, Gracie Lewis, George K. Matsumoto, Colin B. Miller, Jacqueline Montgomery, John T. Morgan, Bruce T. Murray, Lucy Paicius, Dorothy Petit, Princess M. Pryor, Bascom L. Redding, Margaret H. Riegert, Joanne Saxon, Johnnie R. Wallace, Elizabeth J. Williams

Internal Services: Lee O. Heard, Albert W. Kim, Bruce E. Mullin, Imogene Williams

LACERA: Charles E. Avery, Julia M. Noisette

Mental Health: Margaret M. Pappas
Parks and Recreation: Gearl C. Colwell, Richard R. Ziebol, Karl A. Zimmerman

Probation: Paul E. Bernard, Patricia Dwyer, Ernest J. Ochoa, Willis H. Warnick

Public Defender: Mary L. Bellinger
Public Social Services: Gloria J. Banks, John Barnes, Leo W. Childs, James E. Kemeny

Public Works: Joseph G. Banales, Jerry J. Gallagher, Kenneth H. Golding, H.A. Inman, Cappy T. Kina, Carl D. Somers, Donald S. Tabuchi, Michael W. Wood

Sheriff: Robert J. Coffman, Patricia A. Craig, Gary D. Everson, Thomas L. Fryer, Duane D. Hawker, Anderson D. Johnson, Patrick J. Johnston, Stephen E. Lawson, Bertha M. Mackey, Vivian A. Parker, Thomas H. Pavlich, Gary B.

See "Retirees," page three

Employee of the Month

JOHN POPLAWSKI: Guiding Troubled Youth

One day, after recently taking on a new assignment as supervising deputy probation officer, John Poplawski's supervisor met with him to discuss his new duties. After more than three years of overseeing a field staff, Poplawski was challenged to start a new career chapter. That challenge was to get the fledgling GAPP (Gang Alternative Prevention) Program in his East Valley district up and running after only a year in existence department-wide.

Putting creativity and innovation into that program and others offered by the County's Probation Department was a challenge easily met by Poplawski throughout his career, making him a natural choice as the January 1996 County Employee of the Month. On January 30, the Board of Supervisors presented him with a scroll of commendation for his 27 years of service to the Probation Department.

"I originally wanted to be a history teacher," admits Poplawski, recalling his graduation from California State University in Northridge in 1968. But, like many career-minded college graduates, the lure of a full-time position brought his attention to an opening in the Probation Department. At 25, he became a deputy probation officer, and began working his way up the ranks.

Poplawski started out at the San Fernando Juvenile Hall, where he focused on learning the ins and outs of working with troubled youth. It was there that he discovered what would become a lifelong interest for him.

"I love working with the kids because they always have issues," he says, likening the experience to being a parent. "Often times, parents just don't know how to help their kids and they end up in our system. With both parents working in most families, very little

is left for the kids. Parents want to do a good job, they just don't have the tools."

In his position, Poplawski supervises 10 deputy probation officers and one clerk, while developing programs



Poplawski (left) is presented with a scroll from the Board by Chairman Mike Antonovich, as Chief Probation Officer Barry Nidorf (right) joins in the honor.

for seven diverse communities. He also participates on a variety of inter-agency, Probation and program committees, and negotiates for new contracts and grants.

To his credit was the discovery of a little-known piece of legislation in the Welfare and Institutions Code, called "Section 236," giving the Probation Department the authority to provide prevention services to children before they enter the criminal justice system. His refinement of the "236 Program" has brought recognition to the Probation Department. He has been instrumental in bringing this program to fruition to be more responsive to the needs of the community and expand the Department's ability to reach and serve the "at risk" youth population.

He gained new perspective on his job when he returned to his alma mater to earn a master's degree in guidance and counseling, completing it in 1980. Two of his staff officers have become licensed therapists, adding new insight to their task of reaching youngsters.

"We're the bridge between the school and the home," he says.

(from page two)

Snelson, Margaret J. Snelson, Joel A. Williams

Superior Court: Charles B. Stratford, Ritzie L. Williams

Congratulations to the following employees who retired after serving the County for 25 years:

Auditor: James J. Bird

Assessor: Catherine B. Horan

Chief Administrative Office: Gerald A. Roos

District Attorney: Nancy L. Chew, Roy A. Ching, Joan M. Meymarian, Vera White

Health Services: Patricia J. Barnes, Cora J. Barr, Eldoris Chatman, Rose M. Daniel, Victor Dorairaj, Thomas Duggan, Vercelle Everage, Vivian K. Fellenz, Williams A. Fields, Ralph Harpuder, Stella Hogan, Jacquelyn Houston, Clifton Jackson, Millie Jefferson, Mildred B. Jones, Charles Kovan, Joan M. Lewis, Billie F. Lofton, Michael McConnell, Carolyn McDermott, Edward Megginson, Leonard Miller, Maryland Morris, Patrick B. Park, Eleanore Peralta Sadie B. Perkins, Patricia B. Prince, Joseph R. Reyes, Audrey Robinson, Josephine Rodriguez, Melvin Rowlett, Sr., Arthur Rubin, Mary K. Salisbury, Iola Simmons, Albert Tucker, Edward Watson, Margie K. Williams, Maureen Williams, Sallie W. Williams, Billie Holt, C.J. Walker

Internal Services: Eliseo L. Garcia

Medical Examiner/Coroner: Ilona Lewis

Mental Health: Sally A. Bell, Arrie Moore

Probation: John D. Lawson, Steven J. Miles

Public Defender: Dennis M. Gallagher, Gerald E. Peterson

Public Library: Sally Colby

Public Social Services: Ann Belcher, Leslie T. Courseault, Katherine B. Dixon, Helena I. Jordan, Joan L. O'Keefe, Daisy L. Sloan

Public Works: Gerald Colanter

Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk: Janice West

Sheriff: Michael B. Belger, Susan A. Burgoon, Joseph H. Morphew, Jr., James M. Mortensen, Robert I. Najmulski, Edward T. Pena, Alex N. Shoomliansky, Elbert E. Turpen, William J. Vidaurri

Superior Court: Jose M. Patron

The importance of the health and well-being of an individual employee is highlighted when the organization encounters rough waters. Los Angeles County has certainly been navigating through some fiscal turbulence.

Although some have been more directly affected than others, few employees have been free from worry about what lies ahead. As the County's ability to serve its communities is only as good as the collective performance of its employees, the welfare of an employee is not only a matter of personal interest, but is vital to the organization.

On a personal level, our jobs are important to us in many ways. We depend on our jobs for our livelihood, and in many cases loved ones depend

on it as well. Our jobs reflect on our identity, and are often tied to our self-esteem.

Employees differ in how they are affected by difficult times, but even "survivors" of such organizational changes as downsizing and restructuring

may be shaken by the experience, and some may react by doing things that create stress and make matters worse.

For example, our coping skills may be overwhelmed and cause us to:

Vent anger at those we love
Be irritable with coworkers
Become severely depressed
Drive too fast

Overeat or eat poorly
Spend too much money
Make more mistakes
Drink too much
Gamble irresponsibly
Other inappropriate behavior

Such behaviors and reactions not only jeopardize the health and well-being of the employee, but undermine the concerns the employee may have about job security and satisfaction. They also reduce the overall level of efficiency and productivity of the work unit.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and in need of additional help or resources, call your Employee Assistance Program at (213) 887-5300 for free and confidential counseling.

YOU and the County: Staying Afloat

And the Winner Is...

"The seats were fabulous! We could see all of the stars as they walked up to the stage for their awards," says Health Services employee Linda Madrigal, the lucky winner of two tickets to the American Music Awards. Madrigal won the tickets in a contest giveaway published in the December 1995 issue of the County DIGEST. Madrigal invited her daughter Tish to go along for the exciting evening at the Shrine Auditorium, broadcast on ABC-TV. Many thanks to Dick Clark Productions, Paul Shefrin of the The Shefrin Company Public Relations and the County's Film Office for making this special event possible.

LACERA Election Results Are In...

On December 5, 1995, Safety members of the Los Angeles County Employee Retirement Association (LACERA) elected Bob Hermann to the office of Seventh Member, Board of Retirement. Member Cody Ferguson was elected to the office of Alternate Member, Board of Retirement. Both terms end December 31, 1998. Hermann was also elected to the office of Fourth Member, Board of Investments, for the term ending December 31, 1998.

HIV/AIDS Course Offered to County Employees

All County employees are invited to attend a free, eight-hour basic HIV/AIDS course, "Learn the Facts About AIDS: A Workshop," conducted periodically by the Department of Health Services AIDS Programs staff. This workshop will increase staff knowledge, understanding and sensitivity about HIV infection and AIDS, while correcting misconceptions and diminishing fears. Employees will be better equipped to provide more effective services. To pre-register as soon as possible for the training closest to your area, please call Charles Staton at (213) 351-8043. For other information and questions, please call Teresa Level at (213) 351-8026 or Alan Wu at (213) 351-8046.

Quotable Quote:

"You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself."

- Sam Levenson

County DIGEST

Members of the Board

Michael D. Antonovich
Chairman
Fifth District

Gloria Molina
First District

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
Second District

Zev Yaroslavsky
Third District

Deane Dana
Fourth District

Michael J. Henry
Director of Personnel

Sandra A. Hoodye
Community Liaison/Ombudsman

Kristina T. Hajjar
Managing Editor
Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street, Room 588
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 974-2449