

Retired Assessor Historical Questionnaire  
John Thorne - El Dorado County

1. Describe your Career before becoming assessor.

Hired as Appraiser I in November 1962. Progressed to Appraiser II, III and Supervisor Appraiser within a 12 year period. Well, you know I got out of the Marines in 57'. Then I spent a few years trying to find myself.

I filled a milk truck for a year, all kinds of different work. I worked for Aerojet actually for a couple of years too. But actually at the time that I was hired, I was out of work. I had gotten laid off from that construction strike of 62'.

When I was in charge the Marine Recruiting office, I got to know the Veteran's Service office real well, up in Placerville. And Delores Roth was the clerk for the Veteran's Service office. But I walked in her office, of course I'd been out, I hadn't seen her in years because I went back to Camp Kona for two years then I was about, oh a day or so when I went into the office. I'm telling you this because it kinda funny. I walked in her office and she looked at me and she said, "John you're looking for a job?" And I said, "how can you tell Delores?" She said, "I just can tell by the look on your face." And, so, she said, "You know there's an appraiser's job open down in the assessor's office." And I said, "What's an appraiser?"

She's a little sweetheart, I used to really enjoy growing up in Placerville and here and I would go out and have a cup of coffee and talk, she was really a little sweetheart.

Another thing, I applied for the Sheriff's Department, applied for the Probation, I wanted to be a probation officer. Having been in the recruiting office, I saw so many things that just irritated me, you know, the probation officers would just put the guy on probation. I couldn't take them into the Marines, and they were really good applicants.

The Sheriff really wanted me, Ernie Carlson, and he kept saying, boy, I want you John, he said I don't have an opening right now, but you are my next hire. So I said, Sheriff, I have to tell you the truth, I've been out of work for about 6 months, I'm going to have to take what comes first, the Assessor's Office, Probation Office or whatever. He said, okay, I understand. So, Assessor's Office came open and I took that job and 12 years later, Ernie retired and he said, John, did you ever think that maybe if things would have been different you'd be running for Sheriff now?

I might have made a better Sheriff than Assessor.

2. Give the milestones of your assessor career, your elected/appointed, re-election dates, date of retirement.

Elected 1975, sworn in January 1976. Re-elected 4 additional terms unopposed. Retired December 8, 1992 with 30 years county service, 18 as Assessor.

3. Describe your career, if any, after retiring.

Joined my wife Sandy in a successful full-time horse breeding, training and showing business. I was born on the Navaho Indian Reservation. I was born in New Mexico, but lived actually in Arizona, right on the state line, but in the heart of the Reservation. So I kind of got bit by the horse bug when I was born.

Before I went in the Marines, in high school, I worked for a cattle ranch up by Rattle Snake Bar. Our job was to bring the cattle down to Folsom and load them on trucks and then take them to Lake Tahoe for the summer. So I was doing that actually when I was still in high school.

I've always been attached to the horse one way or another. I hung my shingle out as a horse trainer in 1961. That's when I started actually training outside horses. After Sandy and I got married, it was her business because my priority was the Assessor's Office. When I retired and we really went into it hot and heavy and we actually had a world champion out of our barn. We had youth riders and amateur riders and we'd train their horses for them and then take them to the shows, and we actually had one world champion. World Champion.

4. What was your relationship with your predecessor?

Mr. Siqwart hired me in 1962, promoted me and endorsed me in my first election. Tom is a super person.

5. What was your relationship with your successor?

I hired Mr. Winner from Kern County as my Assistant. We had an excellent relation and I endorsed him for election when he filled out the last 2 years of my term.

6. Why did you run for Assessor?

I had no political ambition. The office was with a lot of dissention and my choices were: I could live with it, quit and relocated or run for office. I chose to run. It is a big county and I had to run countywide.

I had pretty good contacts at Lake Tahoe because, you know, I worked that real extensively as an appraiser. We'd go up there twice a year, every year for

sometime 3 and 4 weeks and sometimes I was left up there for 5 or 6 weeks. I took the lake by storm. I had contacts in El Dorado Hills also.

I also got out and established myself with people in Somerset and Coloma and Pilot Hill, various places like that. So, in fact, I was raised around that country, so and I knew all the cowboys, all the ranchers, and all the ranchers knew everybody in the cattle association and grange. I had a real strong base. I was fortunate.

7. What do you consider your greatest accomplishments?

Survival. I remember my first year and how rough it was, everybody was trying to jockey for position and control. It was kind of a sad time for me those first two years. I was green as grass. You know, you think you know the assessor's office working there for 12 years, but then you find out that you were a darn good appraiser, but that what you know was the appraising and I didn't realize the complexity of the documents coming into the office. And then processed through the office and everything that went along with preparing the assessment roll. So here I was trying to learn that and, of course, I had never had the opportunity of going to CAA meetings. I didn't know there was an executive committee, legislative committee, and a standards committee in the CAA because I hadn't had any of that exposure, so here I am now the brand new assessor on the block and I'm trying to learn what an executive, legislative and standards committee is and all that goes with it.

8. What do you wish you could have done differently?

I wish that I could have hired and fired at my discretion, rather than civil service.

9. What do you remember most fondly about time in office?

Closing of the roll and big party at our house. I remember we use to have some fun times in the office around Christmas time when, Sally's dad made the best Tom and Jerry's. We had some good parties. The roll parties I'll never forget. The swimming pool and you know lots of really friendly, great group of people. And, Roger was a good cook too. He'd do the barbequing

10. Where there any parts of your career you wished had not happened?

The first two years were my toughest. Personnel were vying for different control and created many personnel problems.

11. What was your relationship with the CAA?

I feel I had a very good relationship with the CAA. I served on many committees.

12. What is your recollection of the assessor scandals of the 60's?

I was not in office at the time, but was an appraiser in the office. I remember it was a statewide scandal and some went to jail. It created numerous restrictions, checks and balances through the State Board of Equalization.

13. Describe the pressure and stress of the assessor's job prior to the passage of Proposition 13.

The Assessors took all the heat in property taxation with codicil appraisals and sky rocketing property values. The legislation would do nothing to relieve the taxpayers, so the assessors took the heat with no authority to rectify the situation. The people then rebelled with Proposition 13.

14. Where you involved in state or county politics other than the assessor's office? Were there other offices you ran for while in office as the assessor?

No.

15. What kind of person do you think it takes to make a good county assessor? Should an assessor be required to have an appraisal or real estate background?

Honest, intelligent and the ability to handle people. Knowledge of the functioning of the office is a big plus.

16. Our office was selected by Asia and South America as a model office to visit and study for development of their property taxation program.