

‘Reimagining the Priorities’

NONPROFIT: Steve Nissen, new chairman of the L.A. County Economic Development Corp., says the Valley ‘will not be forgotten in our efforts.’

By **AMY STULICK** Staff Reporter

Steven Nissen was appointed chairman of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp. on July 2. He replaces Dianne Harrison, former president of California State University – Northridge. Nissen retired from NBCUniversal in January after serving as senior vice president of legal and government affairs for 12 years, opening up more time for his new role with LAEDC and to further develop his consulting firm, Nissen Consulting Group. He also served on the board of the Valley Industry & Commerce Association. Prior to joining NBCUniversal, Nissen worked in the private sector as a partner in the law firm Manatt Phelps and Phillips and in the public sector as chief executive of the California State Bar and a senior official in the administration of former California Gov. Gray Davis.

Question: What is the LAEDC working on?

Answer: In the last several months we embarked on a strategic planning process, which would normally make people’s eyes glaze over, but it occurred in real time just as the public health crisis, economic disruption and really a long overdue racial justice awakening all occurred basically at the same time. It really drove our strategic planning process to reimagine what LAEDC could be in the future, what our economy was going to look like in the future. And it really drove us to embrace the idea for this economy to work, it had to be an economy based in equity — social and racial and gender equity.

What about initiatives to benefit the Valley?

LAEDC ramped up its small business outreach, especially now when small businesses are disproportionately impacted by the economic disruption we’re going through. We want to be there at the other end with the survivors and to help them.

How much of your time will go toward the chairmanship position?

I think we are all leaping into the great unknown. In a typical year, some chairs are more energetically involved than others, so

there’s no real set amount of hours. This is not going to be a typical year. Everything we do this year, for the most part, will be done for the first time, from remote meetings to remote counseling to completely reimagining the priorities as the economy goes through this dramatic change. The staff of course is paid, but this is a volunteer position.

Valley executives lead the LAEDC now, between yourself and Bill Allen as chief executive. Thoughts?

Bill, as the longtime CEO, has lived in the Valley, I think for all of his life, and I have for the last 20 years, mostly. I think it’s great for the Valley and it’s great for the LAEDC. You have two Valley people in leadership positions. It just means that the Valley will not be forgotten in our efforts. I’m proud of that, but I’m also proud of the fact that we are a diverse, fascinating region and we’re all in it together.

What was your role like at NBCUniversal?

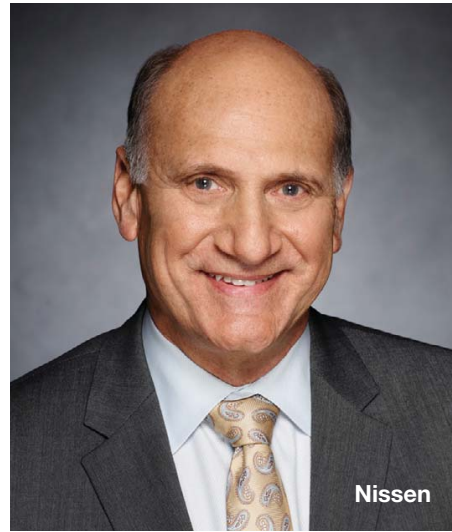
I was in the general counsel office, but I led the government affairs effort within the general counsel’s office. I did oversee state and local government affairs and we had a lot going on during those 12 years. When I first started, NBCUniversal was owned by GE, and a couple years into my tenure there GE sold the company to Comcast, which is the company’s current owner.

What memories stick out the most to you during your NBCUniversal tenure?

There was a multi-billion dollar master plan, upgrading the studio and bringing a lot of new things to the theme park, including most recently and notably the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. That required a lot of work up front ... getting the approvals from (Los Angeles) City Council and from the (L.A. County) Board of Supervisors on the development, which included Harry Potter, and working with organized labor, entering into a project labor agreement.

Challenges?

Piracy — if it’s digitized, it’s much easier to pirate and steal and disseminate all over the world. That was a tremendous



Nissen

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STEVEN NISSEN
Nissen Consulting Group

challenge. Land use issues too, because as I said we had a multibillion-dollar master plan development project. So working with neighborhood groups, working with labor, with government to get everything approved, getting signoff, was a major challenge.

Why did you transition to a more advisory role with your consulting firm?

After all these years of working in big institutions, working in the private sector and nonprofit and government, I wanted an opportunity to strike out on my own and take all those experiences and see how I can help others, whether they’re for-profit companies or nonprofit, as they interface with government, with charitable foundations and in the civic structure of Los Angeles. It’s a crazy time to launch a consulting business based on personal relationships and interactions — and then there’s the pandemic shutdown. That brings peculiar challenges, but through it all I’ve encountered some really interesting opportunities, everything from helping a company provide PPE to schools and hospital systems, to working with a medical research institute to help its advancement efforts.

What personality traits help you in your job?

Everyone’s different. What works for me is curiosity. I’m curious about missions, people, events. I’m open to learning about new and different things; I’m prepared to be surprised every day. I like to get to solutions, but I think it starts with being open-minded and curious about the people around you and the issues around you.

Space Force: Palmdale in Race for HQ

AEROSPACE: City hopes established industry will attract new military branch.

By **ANDREW FOERCH** and **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporters

Palmdale has applied to become the location of the headquarters for the U.S. Space Command.

The Antelope Valley city has received an endorsement from Gov. Gavin Newsom and support from State Sen. Scott Wilk, Assemblyman Tom Lackey and Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger.

The city has not heard back yet from the federal government regarding its application, a spokesman said.

Mayor Steve Hofbauer said that with its rich aerospace history, the region is the best place for the headquarters.



Hofbauer

“Some of the most sophisticated aircraft, including the space shuttles, have been designed, built, flown and tested here at (Air Force) Plant 42 and at Edwards Air Force Base,” Hofbauer said in a statement. “Aerospace is in our DNA.”

City Manager J.J. Murphy, a retired Air

Force officer, told the Business Journal the presence of industry giants including Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Boeing and NASA in Palmdale provides myriad career opportunities for space command personnel when they retire from the military.

He added the city is in the midst of a “renaissance period,” with a burgeoning downtown scene and several major infrastructure projects in the works.

“Within the next five years, we should have an operating commercial airport here in Palmdale. We will have high-speed rail service via Virgin Trains from Palmdale to Las Vegas. That’ll help young entrepreneurs make a decision (to relocate). We have affordable, high-quality housing with market-rate apartments coming on the market in the next 12 months,” he said. “Landing Space Force would be a cherry on top.”

Criteria for the Space Command headquarters include having a population base within the top 150 largest metropolitan statistical areas in the country, a military base within 25 miles and a livability index score of 50 points out of 100 or higher as determined by the American Association of Retired Persons Public Policy Institute. Palmdale meets all those criteria.

Murphy added the city has thousands of acres of wide-open land for Space Force.

“We have two spaces that are directly adjacent to Plant 42. One is city owned and is 600 acres. We would certainly be able to offer that up as part of a future stage if we make the next round. We also ... have 17,500 acres directly adjacent to Plant 42 that is currently owned by Los Angeles World Airports.”

He said LAVA bought the space years ago for Los Angeles International Airport East campus, which never materialized.

“What better use of that land than the Space Force HQ?” he posited.

The U.S. Space Command is a separate branch of the Defense Department responsible for military operations in outer space, specifically at altitudes of 100 kilometers or more.



Listener: Nissen at Valley Industry & Commerce Association luncheon in 2016.