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Opinion: Supervisor outlines priorities

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Special to the Mercury News

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My parents settled in the Mayfair neighborhood of East San Jose during the 1960s. The locals called that neighborhood Sal Si Puedes — "get out if you can." The nickname came from the days when there were no paved roads, and it would be hard to get out because cars got stuck in the mud-filled streets.

Those were the days when government didn't reach out to the East Side community, and the community's needs fell on deaf ears. Even as a boy, I realized our government didn't care about us. It was these experiences that led to my parents' passionate belief in serving the community. My parents passed that belief on to me.

As a young man, I also came to believe that the community is best served when the community is heard. To that end, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, I believe that county government is of the community, by the community and for the community. This philosophy will guide me as I work on major issues that face District 2.

During the next four years, my staff and I will fan out to every corner of District 2 to listen to the community's hopes, dreams and ideas, and I'll ensure that county government includes their participation on the following initiatives:

The county fairgrounds. Revitalization should meet the needs of the entire county without sacrificing the needs of the surrounding community.

County/school partnerships. I will develop partnerships with schools to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for our children.

Three Creeks trail. Working with the city of San Jose, we should finish the trail project that will connect downtown with Willow Glen neighborhoods.

Downtown medical facilities. By developing creative partnerships with city, state and federal agencies, we can provide downtown neighborhoods with first-rate medical facilities.

My mother's family struggled to survive in the Central Valley. Her family lived in a labor camp on the side of the road on Highway 43 without indoor plumbing until she was 17 years old. This had a profound effect on my mom for her entire life. She knew, firsthand, the struggles of poverty on families and dedicated herself to helping those less fortunate.

I remember as a teenager watching my father reach out to those in need as a teacher, counselor, coach and San Jose City Council member. The door to our home was always open to those seeking help or to those who just wanted someone to listen. When it was my turn to serve as a military police officer, coach, school board member and City Council member, I, too, became convinced that the strength of a community is the community itself.

Now, as a county supervisor in District 2, I have big shoes to fill, following in the footsteps of Rep. Zoe Lofgren and Supervisor Blanca Alvarado. To honor their legacy, I will reach out to all who want to be heard, to all who need to be heard, and to all who have never been heard before.

As we prepare for the challenging budget ahead, we

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must maintain a safety net for the needy, we must be prepared for any emergency that may come our way, and we must ensure a good quality of life for county residents. And most important, we must never forget those we have promised to serve.

There are difficult decisions on the horizon. We don't have the dollars to do everything we want to do. But together, we will weather this storm because I believe that Santa Clara County, working as a community, will survive and thrive with hard work, faith and hope for a better future.

George Shirakawa will be sworn in today to represent District 2 on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. He wrote this article for the Mercury News.

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