

Huntington's new administrator begins

By Ann Pepper
The Register

HUNTINGTON BEACH — Michael T. Uberuaga, chosen from among 80 candidates in December, became city administrator Monday.

He brings a reputation for handling city issues in a businesslike style with a close eye on money matters.

He replaces Paul Cook. Cook, who turned over management of the city to his successor this week, held the job for 2½ years.

Uberuaga, (pronounced Oo-ber-ah-guh,) spent his first hours on the job meeting with department heads and City Council members.

"The first couple of weeks will really be orientation on the various projects the city is involved in," he said.

"But probably the most prominent issue right now is the status of the oil spill."

On Tuesday afternoon, he toured

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areas blackened by the Feb. 7 spill of almost 400,000 gallons of crude oil.

Within the next six months, Uberuaga, 45, plans to present a comprehensive financial report to the council describing the city's financial status and predicting its ability to provide municipal services.

Concord, where he previously was city manager, benefited considerably from his financial abilities, Concord City Councilwoman Colleen Coll said.

When Uberuaga assumed the Concord post in April 1985 the city had a \$4.5 million budget deficit.

He cut spending and eliminated about 60 positions, and the city quickly added up a \$1.8 million surplus, Coll said.

Huntington Beach City Councilwoman Grace Winchell said she has found the new administrator committed to responding to the community's needs.

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POST: New administrator takes reins

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"I perceive he's a seasoned, well-experienced administrator who understands his role to be in finding the consensus of the community, its feel, its needs and presenting that to the council in a way that will allow the council to make the clearest possible decisions," Winchell said.

"And I think he has the skills to do it."

Uberuaga will earn a \$118,285 annual salary.

On his way to a golfing lesson Tuesday, Cook joked that his retirement already had reduced his blood pressure considerably.

He plans to open a development and traffic-engineering consulting office downtown at Third Street and Olive Avenue.

Several council members credited Cook with getting long-stalled downtown redevelopment going — but Cook and Mayor Tom Mays



Michael Uberuaga
Experienced administrator

said Cook's best achievement was securing the agreement that will preserve a large portion of the Bolsa Chica Wetlands.

After years of wrangling between environmentalists and Signal Landmark Inc., the arrangement worked out during the past year calls for the restoration of more than 1,000 acres of the 1,600-acre wetlands along Pacific Coast



Paul Cook
Bolsa Chica 'crowning glory'

Highway while allowing Signal to build homes on a portion of the remaining land. Signal is based in Irvine.

"When people think of me, they think of downtown," Cook said.

"But I think my biggest accomplishment by far was being a major player in resolving the Bolsa Chica controversy. The Bolsa Chica was my crowning glory."