

Fresno City Hall's digital chief gets national honor

By George
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Carolyn Hogg

CITY OF FRESNO

City Hall's top digital expert is getting national props for her innovative use of technology to improve Fresno.

Carolyn Hogg says the effort comes naturally — she loves the place.

Fresno's chief information officer has been named one of America's top 25 "Doers, Dreamers & Drivers" for 2015 by Government Technology magazine.

Hogg was honored for her "transformative use of technology that's improving the way government does business," states the magazine.

Hogg cuts to the chase: "It's for thinking outside the box."

Hogg arrived at City Hall in 2007. She was settling in when the Great Recession hit. She soon lost half her staff.

Yet, the wolf at the door actually opened opportunities for her.

As Hogg tells the story, Mayor Ashley Swearengin took office in 2009 with firm belief in the power of collaboration. The crisis demands that you talk to other agencies, Swearengin told Hogg. Use your new allies to innovate in a way that boosts the resilient society that is Fresno.

Hogg cites two examples of her all-in-it-together, high-tech work.

Agriculture gurus have talked for years about a digital revolution that gives Fresno County a twofer — higher yields in the fields with fewer resources and renown as the world's farm-technology center. This idea was Swearengin's sweet spot in her days with the Regional Jobs Initiative. It's among her favorite themes as mayor.

The challenge is getting big telecommunications companies to bring high-speed Internet access (broadband) to the places where the crops grow. Vineyards don't have wallets the way people do, so companies concentrate on urban centers full of the latter.

Hogg is working with regional and federal officials to bring broadband to rural communities. The next step would be convincing high-tech agriculture companies to secure a major presence in a spot strategically located to maximize this growing market — downtown Fresno, for example.

Hogg says the goal is to get the companies "to see rows of crops as their new revenue source."

Then there is City Hall's "dig once" policy. Where applicable, city crews doing a maintenance dig now also lay a conduit for future broadband cable.

"The need for technology is going to get bigger and bigger," Hogg says. "We are preparing for the future."

High-tech can seem bloodless to the uninitiated. Hogg sees its connection to a better life.



“I was born and raised in Fresno,” Hogg says. “I’m proud of Fresno. If we can we make Fresno what it can become — the ag-tech center of the world — that would be great for me personally and it would be great for Fresno.”

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