

Mark Pestrella. Los Angeles County – 2020 CEAC Engineer of the Year

In 2017, Mark Pestrella, was appointed the sixth Director of Los Angeles County Public Works. Mark oversees the largest municipal public works agency in the United States, providing public infrastructure and municipal services to more than 10 million people across a 4,000-square-mile service area. In his role as Director, Mark serves as the County's Engineer, Road Commissioner, and Chief Engineer of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, among other titles. Public Works is comprised of nearly 4,000 employees working in diverse operations within six Core Service Areas – Water Resources, Transportation, Environmental Services, Construction Management, Development Services and Emergency Management. Throughout his tenure as a public servant, Mark has demonstrated continued dedication to improving the quality of life for LA County residents and has served as a regional leader through many challenging circumstances to fulfill his vision for LA County Public Works to be the most trusted agency in the region.

The 2018, Woolsey Fire was a devastating event, impacting both Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. In all, the fire burned close to 97,000 acres, destroying 1,121 structures in its path, and claimed three lives. In the wake of the destruction caused by the Woolsey Fire, Mark immediately mobilized his team to help impacted residents of Los Angeles County recover and rebuild. He wasted no time in conducting home and business inspections to ensure that residents and business owners could return to structures deemed safe for access. He also implemented a one-stop approach for impacted residents and businesses. The Woolsey Fire destroyed two bridges, guardrails and other infrastructure along key transit and evacuation routes. Mark and his Team managed the expeditious replacement of these bridges and guardrails to restore these vital passages. Adding to the challenge was the fire's occurrence during the storm season, leaving little to no pre-storm preparation time. Public Works' post-fire debris flow mitigation actions included estimating debris flows; interactive mapping of debris flows, properties and roadways; visiting almost 3,000 fire area properties for potential debris flow impacts and providing engineering advice on interim debris mitigation measures to nearly 500 property owners; and repairing and cleaning out existing debris mitigation structures such as inlets, rail and timber structures. Public Works' engineers monitored weather forecasts and issued debris flow forecasts in anticipation of storms. Debris flow forecasts were shared with first responders and support agencies via a unified command that included Public Works and numerous emergency management entities.

Los Angeles County faces many difficult challenges with water resiliency – most of the water supply is imported, stormwater and urban runoff is heavily polluted, and water governance is fractured with over 200 independent water agencies. The County needed a leader to step up and tackle these issues with a regional approach. Mark responded by leading the 2018 effort to establish the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCW) to establish a new, sustained revenue stream to increase local water supply, improve water quality, and protect public health in Los Angeles County. Following voter approval in 2018, the SCW Program now generates approximately \$280M annually, and includes comprehensive governance, and transparent processes for the implementation of multi-benefit projects and programs that increase stormwater and urban runoff capture and reduce stormwater and urban runoff pollution in Los Angeles County, with an emphasis on Disadvantaged Communities.

In March 2020, Mark led the effort to establish Infrastructure LA, a platform for public and private collaboration on infrastructure strategies in LA County. Participants include 151 cities, unincorporated communities, businesses, and organizations. Key initiatives include COVID-19, Sustainable Waste and Management, Construction Industry, and Agency/Municipality Construction. Since April 2020, Infrastructure LA has hosted 25 teleconferences on the key initiatives and other topics and launched an online forum for the region's infrastructure leaders to discuss key topics with colleagues who share common goals and challenges related to infrastructure in the region.

The Los Angeles region is home to many people currently experiencing homelessness. This complex problem was made all the more complicated by the emergence of COVID-19. Mark has been consistently dedicated to providing assistance to people experiencing homelessness and continues to support the County's efforts to combat the issue from many angles. Mark and his team implemented the Food Donation Recovery and Outreach Program (Food DROP) to address issues of food insecurity and organic waste management. His team also continues to expedite projects to create new shelters, safe parking sites, and affordable housing throughout the County. Under his direction, Public Works teams conducted inspections and assessments of interim housing during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the County's Project RoomKey initiative. To help slow the spread of COVID-19 and Hepatitis A, his team collaborate with Public Health officials to operate public hygiene facilities near homeless encampments along the region's major waterways. Mark approaches his duty with compassion and understanding.

As the region continues to grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mark has taken great care in investing in the workforce. With the understanding that each member of his team faces new challenges in continuing to provide essential services to the residents of LA County, he makes it a priority to engage with all 4,000 employees under his direction by recording weekly addresses in which he highlights the valuable work being done, the importance of staying focused on our mission, and the resources available to all employees to tackle the mental stresses that are inevitable while enduring such trying times.