Kehoe is proudest of Urban Village
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For outgoing San Diego Councilwoman Christine Kehoe, the Urban Village redevelopment project in City Heights is her proudest accomplishment.

After getting elected in the first place, that is.

She says her biggest regret is that she voted for the Chargers ticket guarantee, a mistake she is reminded of every week by news stories with a running total of how much taxpayers have spent to buy unsold tickets.

Calling the guarantee a painful "public relations disaster," she said she hates knowing that "people think we shirked our responsibility in being watchdogs."

"It really shows that no matter how well-intentioned a City Council may be, or honest or smart, if you're not getting the right information, you can really end up in some deep trouble," she said.

Nevertheless, the ticket guarantee seems not to have tarnished Kehoe's reputation much.

"She's one of the best elected officials I've ever observed," said Scott Barnett, executive director of the San Diego County Taxpayers Association.

He noted that Kehoe represents a diverse district, where her 150,000 constituents range from refugees living six to a room to owners of $1 million canyon homes in Kensington.

"She is truly a district representative," he said. "She is very nonpolitical. She is clearly not searching for headlines, but searching for solutions."

Still, Barnett said, Kehoe's role in failing to resolve problems such as deferred maintenance and using one-time funds to balance the budget should not be overlooked.

"I still have to fault all the council on kind of ignoring the citywide fiscal issues and concerns," he said. Unlike outgoing Councilwoman Judy McCarty, he said, Kehoe "did nothing to question those issues."

Kehoe probably will be remembered most for her stewardship of the Urban Village.

A pet project in her district, the Urban Village started with a new police substation in
1996. It has grown to include an elementary school, a recreation center with a pool, a library, an outdoor theater and an adult education center.

Soon, a small shopping center with a supermarket will be added within the 10-block area. Later, affordable town houses are to be built.

Working with developer William Jones, community activists and local school and community college officials, Kehoe helped revitalize a blighted area that once had one of the worst crime and drug problems in the city.

But Kehoe gave all the credit to the residents.

"It's really a tribute to the people of City Heights," she said. "I have great constituents. It's been wonderful to work with them."

Councilman George Stevens, who sits next to Kehoe at council meetings, described her as "the best thing that ever happened to District 3."

Stevens said he has been especially impressed with the swim meets now held for young people in the Urban Village pool.

"One of the biggest joys is these kids coming together," he said.

Kehoe, like her colleagues, was limited to two terms on the council by a 1992 ballot initiative.

Elected to the District 3 seat in 1993, she made an unsuccessful bid for Congress two years ago. In November, she won a seat in the state Assembly.

Democrat Kehoe beat Republican Michele Nash-Hoff and Libertarian David Oakley, getting 61.3 percent of the vote.

"My agenda is going to continue to be improving the quality of life for the people of San Diego," she said. "I like government. I think the process is worthwhile."

Kehoe said that being the first openly gay person to join the City Council will always be part of her legacy. And now, she noted, she will be the first openly gay person from San Diego to join the Assembly.

John Hartley, her predecessor as District 3's council representative, said he encouraged Kehoe to run for the council seat. Kehoe had worked as an aide to Hartley, in charge of land-use issues and business improvement districts.

"I thought she was pretty bright and articulate and that she would make a good representative from the gay community and I think she's done that," he said.
Hartley, too, cited the Urban Village as an illustration of her talents.

"She's done a good job at . . . working on problems and ensuring that the city would work with the entrepreneurs and the people trying to make the difference," he said.

Kehoe will be replaced by one of her aides, Toni Atkins, who also is openly gay. Atkins beat Hartley Nov. 7 and will be sworn in Monday with the new mayor, Dick Murphy, and three newly elected council members.

Kehoe was chairwoman of the Public Safety and Natural Resources Committee in 1995 and 1996. She also served as a member of the California Coastal Commission since 1997.

"I hope that people remember me as hard-working and accessible," Kehoe said.

Caption: 2 PICS
1. Christine Kehoe (Ed. 7) 2. Outgoing City Councilwoman Christine Kehoe shook a hand while saying goodbye to performer Satin after helping make a birthday video for a friend. (B-3:1; B-6:2) 2. Peggy Peattie / Union-Tribune
Memo: Head varies

Title appears in Edition 7 only.
Edition: 1,2,7
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Column: SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL
Correction: FOR THE RECORD The surname of David Oakey, unsuccessful Libertarian Party candidate for the 76th District Assembly seat, was misspelled "Oakley" in a Dec. 1 story about outgoing San Diego Councilwoman Christine Kehoe, who won the election. The Union-Tribune regrets the error. (12/08/2000, B-2)
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