

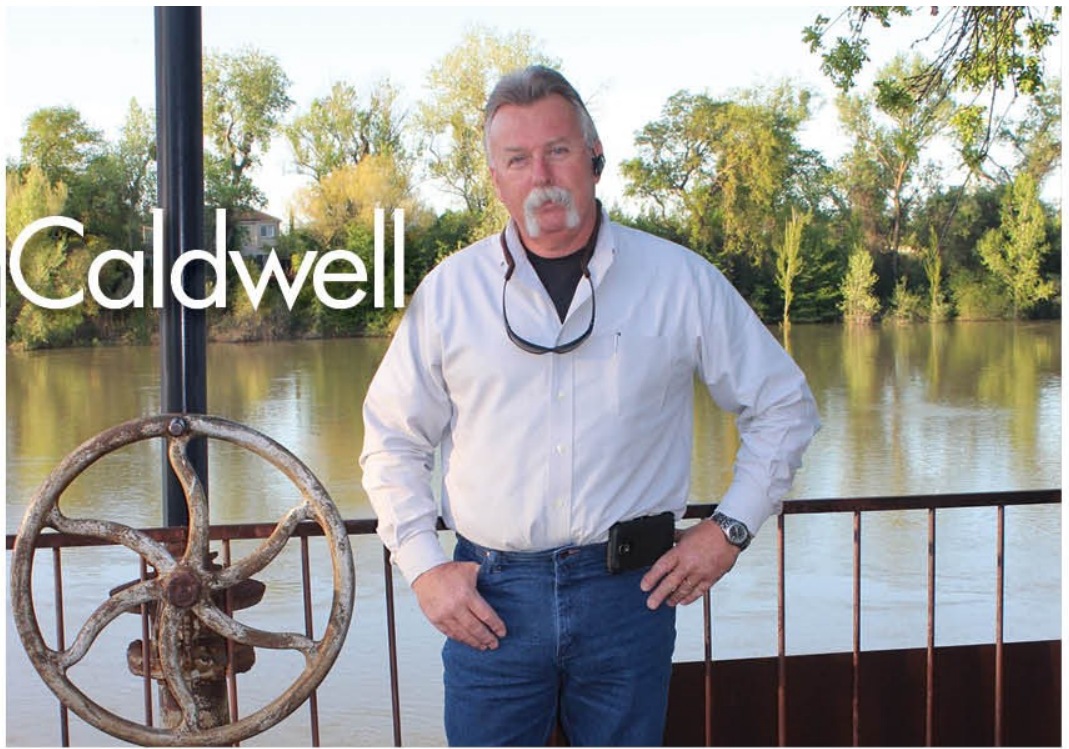


Community Profile
By | Karen Wilson

Don Caldwell

"There was no North Natomas when I started here as a mechanic in 1993," Don says. "ARCO, that whole area was rice and sugar beet fields. Even Del Paso Road was sugar beet fields."

(top right) On the patio at the RD1000 offices just west of Chevy's on Garden Highway.



Don Caldwell leads the nine-man field crew that does the daily work of operating and maintaining more than 40 miles of levees

in the Natomas Basin, providing flood protection for Natomas. And that's just part of his day. As District Superintendent at Reclamation District 1000, he is reviewing plans for future development that will affect RD1000 facilities and levees, and outlining the specific improvements that will upgrade flood protection as part of an upcoming Capital Improvement Program: preventive maintenance, updating aging facilities and infrastructure that include seven pumping plants and hundreds of miles of canals.

In his nearly 28 years with RD1000, Caldwell has had a front row seat to changes in Natomas. "There was no North Natomas when I started here as a mechanic in 1993," he says. "ARCO, that whole area was rice and sugar beet

fields. Even Del Paso Road was sugar beet fields. North of Del Paso was all in rice. Now that's gone. The whole northeastern side of our District will be developed within 10 years."

The scale of development in Natomas is a constant challenge. At Metro Airpark, Amazon and Walmart combined will soon have about two million square feet of distribution warehouse space. Much more is coming, and flood control for our flat landscape will have to keep up. "When it gets developed like that," Caldwell says, "water runs off instead of sinking into the ground. Developers are paying for extra pumps, and larger pumps under the freeways to move water better."

When Caldwell says he knows every inch of pipe and ditch in RD1000, you believe him. His sense of urgency about flood protection is personal. In 2006, during heavy rainfall, Caldwell and his crew spotted boils and seepage while patrolling the levee. They worked through the night and the following days, sparing Natomas from a potentially catastrophic flood.

They did it again when a record-setting winter storm threatened to compromise a District levee in 2017. The erosion that can compromise levees is often caused by fallen trees or burrowing rodents, but increasingly, damage is being caused by homeless people carving out campsites on the American River. Caldwell works with the Sacramento Police Department's Impact Team, and with the County Public Health Agency as his crew helps to clean up encampments that threaten levee integrity.

In what spare time he has, Caldwell is crew chief for a team in the National Hot Rod Racing Association. He lives on a ranch, and mends his own fences. He takes pride in that, as he does in all of his work. "I'm proud of my whole 28 years with the District," he says. "Our ratepayers are counting on me to take care of them. That's our job."



(top) Don discusses the workings of one of the pumping stations that are part of the levee system he maintains with his RD1000 crew.

(above) Don works with the community each year on "Creek Week," a cleanup time where the whole of Natomas volunteers and helps keep our waterways clean.

Learn More

RD1000
rd1000.org