

# Powers

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made unwanted sexual advances toward her on two occasions in early 2019 and treated her differently after she rebuffed them.

She says Powers, who is white, called her “Pico Rivera (her first name)” on multiple occasions in front of coworkers, a fact that was confirmed by two witnesses who spoke to an independent investigator hired by the county last fall to look into the woman’s allegations.

Pico Rivera is a city near Los Angeles with a heavy Latino population.

“He used that name when (she) voiced concerns at meetings for the lack of resources/services and/or any issues in low income and communities of color,” the discrimination complaint says.

Powers said had he known the woman found the term offensive, he would have ceased using it immediately.

“As a white male, I realize I must continually remember that times and perspectives change rapidly. I have dedicated my career to creating an open, safe and inclusive workplace and have taken action to address discrimination whenever it is seen,” he said.

Asked how a man in his position, a 30-year veteran of the county with a law degree and experience in human resources, didn’t see a



DANIEL WOLOWICZ/Acorn Newspapers

**TOP BRASS**—The entryway to the chief executive’s office on the fourth floor of the government center in Ventura. Mike Powers’ accuser says the CEO tried to kiss her one day inside that office in early 2019.

problem with the moniker, Powers responded: “As CEO, I should absolutely be held to a higher standard. Looking back, and learning now that she did not like it, of course I wish that I had not used it.”

The accuser’s attorney, David Myers, did not respond to a request for comment for this article. He previously told the *Acorn* that Powers is lying.

“Mr. Powers continues to make statements to the press which he knows are not true,” Myers said in March. “I’d recommend that Mr. Powers focus on his wife and kids because that’s where his focus really needs to be at this point. I think he’s done enough harm for

everybody both in his conduct while working for the County of Ventura, as well as after.”

### Differing version of events

Powers, in his 11th year as CEO, resigned in March after the Board of Supervisors voted in closed session to place him on leave after learning that an outside investigation they commissioned had found evidence to support the woman’s allegations of mistreatment and sexual harassment.

The results of that investigation were leaked to the *Acorn*.

In it, the lead investigator, attorney Marilou F. Mirkovich, says because no one besides Powers and the woman witnessed the alleged

sexual advances—one outside a Ventura restaurant and the other inside Powers’ office on the fourth floor of the government center—the key question became “whose version of these incidents is more credible.”

Mirkovich ultimately sides with the woman, noting how her story had not changed from the time she told a colleague about Powers’ actions in 2019 to the present, and how she was able to provide phone records and text messages to back up her recollections.

Mirkovich is less convinced, according to the report, by Powers’ suggestion that it was the woman who made romantic overtures toward him and not the other way around.

To demonstrate they still had a good relationship after the alleged incidents, Powers provided Mirkovich with friendly texts the two had exchanged in recent years, according to the report.

“In essence, Mr. Powers’ argument is that because (the woman) engaged in friendly behavior with him after the unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, she must be fabricating those allegations,” the report says. “This argument does not account for the possibility that (the) friendly behavior was the product of a fear that acting in a manner that differed from her behavior before the Jan. 31, 2019 incident (outside the restaurant), given the power differential between her and

Mr. Powers, would jeopardize her county employment.”

Powers, who is married with children, said the investigator simply got it wrong.

“I categorically deny the allegation of sexual harassment that has been made against me,” he told the *Acorn*.

Questioned whether it was appropriate to have dinner and drinks alone with a subordinate, Powers said it wasn’t unusual for members of the county to attend events late in the evening and then have something to eat after.

On the night in question, Powers said, the two attended a work function but showed up too late to eat so decided to grab a bite after.

“Following the event, we had dinner and likely a drink with it,” he said. “Given the circumstances and frequent carpooling, I do not believe that was inappropriate. The receipt for that evening, which I gave to the investigator, reflects that very little alcohol was consumed.”

Powers admits to getting into the woman’s car—where she says he kissed her and asked to sleep with her—but says it was only to talk.

“After dinner, we did sit in her car and discussed work and personal matters,” he said. “This was not unusual as we had worked closely together for a long time. Nothing beyond conversation occurred.”

Asked why the woman would fabricate such a story to harm him two years after the fact, the former CEO told the *Acorn* “I don’t know.”

“I have asked myself this question a million times. Was it her feelings toward me? Her sense of being excluded? Something else? I can only address the issue of exclusion and it would be pure speculation as to other potential motives,” he said.

In his statement, Powers also comes to the defense of his staff on the fourth floor of the government center.

“As to my office, I want to be clear, they are good, caring leaders deeply committed to diversity, equity and inclusion,” he said.

It’s unclear what’s next for Powers. The county has moved on, appointing a replacement (Sevet Johnson) and beginning a nationwide search to find a permanent CEO.

Powers called Johnson an “excellent choice.”

“I know my feelings are not what’s important right now to the community, but please know that I am absolutely heartbroken at what has transpired,” he said. “I have only ever intended to be of service.”

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