

# From Pool Guy to the Halls of Power

**Terry Tamminen, actor, author and tree-hugger, has held many jobs. His next: Cabinet secretary.**

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Thirteen years ago, Terry Tamminen was a Malibu pool cleaner and part-time actor with a gift for charming influential people and a resume that chronicled more rambling than a Jack Kerouac novel.

Tamminen had sold condos in Florida, managed a sheep ranch in the Midwest, helped start a bottle recycling program in Nigeria, dabbled in Shakespearean acting and measured chlorine levels for such celebrities as Madonna and Johnny Carson. His peripatetic career had taken him from California to Australia to Europe and back again.

In his 40s and still unfulfilled, Tamminen began moving more purposefully in a direction that ultimately brought him to the attention of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. Last year, Schwarzenegger appointed him environmental protection secretary. On Friday, he named Tamminen his Cabinet secretary. The \$123,000-a-year job makes him chief liaison between the governor and the heads of the major state agencies.

Among the most liberal of Schwarzenegger's advisors — a self-described "tree-hugger," Tamminen has won the Republican governor's confidence for his bipartisan negotiating skills and loyalty to Schwarzenegger's agenda.

"Terry, I have to say, is one of the jewels of my administration," Schwarzenegger said in a recent interview. "He gets along with Democrats and Republicans alike. He is extremely respected by everyone. I think the world of him."

Bonnie Reiss, Schwarzenegger's longtime friend and now senior advisor, said Tamminen and the governor "had good energy together. Terry had a lot of vision on what new technology can bring, from solar to wind to hydrogen, and that really connected with the governor. They are renaissance guys."

Tamminen's unlikely rise began in 1991 when he persuaded the late Disney President Frank Wells to finance Santa Monica Baykeeper, part of a national network of environmental groups dedicated to protecting oceans and rivers. The network is headed by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a cousin of California First Lady Maria Shriver.

The pool-keeper thus became bay-keeper. When Dustin Hoffman later ran into Tamminen at an environmental fundraiser, Tamminen said the actor told his former pool man, "Glad to see you finally cleaning up the big pool."

A decade later, Tamminen made a similar impression on Schwarzenegger when he helped write his environmental platform during last year's recall election. With promises to cut air pollution in half and put solar panels on the roofs of a million homes within a decade, Tamminen's aggressive green agenda was the most left-leaning element of Schwarzenegger's pro-business platform.

Schwarzenegger appointed Tamminen head of the California Environmental Protection Agency over the strong objections of more conservative advisors, including Rep. David Dreier (R-San Dimas), head of Schwarzenegger's transition team.

Though he now wears blue and gray business suits and spends long hours helping Schwarzenegger

in Sacramento, Tamminen, a Coast Guard-licensed sea captain, retires at night to his boat, docked on the Sacramento River.

"There's toads croaking and birds chirping and all the sounds of the river at night," Tamminen said. "And in the morning, I get up and go back to work in an office building again."

Those who have known Tamminen since his pool cleaning days marvel at the meteoric success enjoyed by the 52-year-old Santa Monica conservationist, calling it the kind of story that could happen only in California.

"If Terry is not the embodiment of the American dream, I don't know what is," said Mark Gold, director of the Santa Monica environmental group Heal the Bay.

Born in Wisconsin, Tamminen moved often as a child with his mother and stepfather, living in Las Vegas; Corpus Christi, Texas; and even Mexico before landing in Los Angeles in the early 1960s. Inspired by the television adventures of Mike Nelson in "Sea Hunt," Tamminen was enchanted by the ocean. For his 12th birthday, he received scuba lessons that culminated with a dive off the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

When it came time for Tamminen to attend high school, the family was on the move again — to Australia, where the government was paying families to move to populate the vast country. After graduation, Tamminen traveled through Europe, paying his way by working as a desk clerk and bellman, before returning to California to attend Cal State Northridge and pursue acting dreams.

"I was always a free spirit. It was, 'Let's go out and see the world,' " Tamminen said, explaining his wandering ways, which he characterized as a lifelong quest for knowledge that still continues.

A few years later, he moved to Florida, where he befriended a developer and went to work for him converting old apartments into condos. The developer owned a sheep ranch, billed as the largest east of the Mississippi, and Tamminen briefly managed it before returning to California in the early 1980s. He used his modest Florida earnings to buy a small pool-cleaning business in Malibu that catered to a celebrity clientele.

It was far from a glamorous existence. Tamminen lived in a trailer off Pacific Coast Highway with the family of his business partner, a competitive weightlifter he had met in Florida. Palisades Malibu Pools eventually grew tenfold, expanding into Beverly Hills and serving a stable of showbiz luminaries.

"There wasn't anyone in the celebrity world whose pool we were not cleaning at one time," said Tamminen's former partner, Ritchie Creevy, 61, who is still competing in state and national power-lifting events.

After selling the business, the ever-resourceful Tamminen parlayed his knowledge into "The Ultimate Pool Maintenance Manual," now in its second edition. Around the same time, he began playing William Shakespeare in a children's play that he wrote and has since performed in New York and abroad.

Busy as he was, Tamminen still hadn't found his stride.

"At that point, I was in my mid-40s, and maybe it was a midlife crisis, but I wanted to do something more," he said. "I had done the business thing; it was not that rewarding to me. I decided to do something with the rest of my life that I was passionate about."

Within a year, Tamminen had become the head of Santa Monica Baykeeper, a self-styled "aqua cop"

who would boat around in search of water polluters big and small. He sought to educate boaters about the damage done by casual pollution by handing out fake tickets.

"He was right out of Central Casting," said Mary Nichols, former resources secretary under Gov. Gray Davis. "It clearly suited his personality. He had his boat and whatnot, and that was the mystique of the organization: that you literally had someone out there patrolling the body of water."

One of Tamminen's first efforts as head of Cal-EPA was to make sure that California continued developing regulations for the water pollutant perchlorate. In the process, he stood firm amid lobbying pressure from a coalition of defense contractors who were responsible for much of the contamination.

Tamminen proved adept at the political art of give and take, helping to mold a consensus from an unlikely alliance that included the oil industry and environmentalists to raise more than \$150 million in new fees to help clean up air pollution.

Tamminen also has been willing to cross his old friends in the environmental movement. He led the administration's successful campaign to block legislation that would have capped air pollution emissions at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The governor's opposition was one of the reasons the California League of Conservation Voters gave Schwarzenegger a middling 58% grade on its environmental scorecard last month after giving former Gov. Gray Davis a 100% grade a year earlier.

But it solidified Tamminen's standing as a Cabinet member loyal above all to Schwarzenegger.

"Terry comes into this with an open mind," said Mike Chrisman, a Central Valley rancher who serves as Schwarzenegger's resources secretary. "He has very strong views, but he understands that in government sometimes you have to compromise, and he looks for the best compromises."

Tamminen came to the attention of Schwarzenegger through Kennedy, one of the nation's leading environmental activists. After he became the head of Santa Monica Baykeeper, Tamminen took a crash course in environmental advocacy under Kennedy at Pace Law School.

Days after Schwarzenegger announced his run for governor on the "Tonight Show With Jay Leno" last year, Kennedy put in a strong word for Tamminen when he saw Schwarzenegger at a Kennedy family retreat in Hyannis Port, Mass. Within days, Tamminen was in an office above Schwarzenegger's Santa Monica restaurant, Schatzi on Main, sounding out the candidate on his environmental views.

"Arnold asked me to help him prepare a team of Republican and Democratic environmentalists," Kennedy said, "and the first person I called was Terry. Terry fit that bill because he had basically done everything. As a Shakespearean actor, I knew Terry would be good at articulating policy."

Tamminen spends weekends at home in Santa Monica with his wife, Karen, a theatrical representative for the Screen Actors Guild, where he still finds time to write. He is working on a fictional diary of Shakespeare. It is inspired by "I, Claudius," the Robert Graves novel that tells the story of ancient Rome through a fictional autobiography of one of its rulers. The walls of his study are lined with maps of old London that he has marked up as he tries to link Shakespeare's writings with real places.

In another book project, one that displays his militant side, Tamminen calls for an end to the oil age. He said he described the recently completed manuscript to the governor, who did not object if it were published.

"Oil has advanced our human cause for 100 years, but it's a dinosaur," Tamminen said. "The book

lays out the economic and environmental cost of our dependence on oil, and, frankly, likens it to tobacco. We pay a lot more than \$2.50 for a gallon of gas, and it's not all at the pump."