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Orinda Thanks Severson for Years of Leadership

By Laurie Snyder



"This is our one last picture," said Steve Glazer as he gathered council members together to honor 2014 Orinda mayor and retiring City Council member Sue Severson. From left: Steve Glazer, Amy Worth, Sue Severson, Victoria Smith and Dean Orr
Photo Ohlen Alexander

"Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Orinda City Council does hereby recognize Sue Severson for her service on the Orinda City Council for the past 8 years. Be it further resolved that the city council honors Sue Severson for her service as 2014 mayor of Orinda, and thanks her for her timeless commitment and dedication to the citizens of Orinda."

"Ask not what your country can do for you" was the driver behind the distribution of awards for excellence, the emergence of a future Czech civic leader, and the recognition of a woman who has championed

everything from Orinda's schools to the city's beautification to its regionally beloved Fourth of July Parade as Orindans came together to honor the achievements of their own Dec. 2. In a night filled with heartening moments, the most inspiring came for many during the recognition of long-time civic leader Sue Severson.

"Sue's extraordinary work, selfless dedication and generosity have touched every area of Orinda life, including the schools, parks, civic activities, the arts, recreation, and numerous charities," said Orinda City Council Member Dean Orr, one of

Severson's colleagues who took turns reading from a proclamation with "Whereas" sections so numerous that the formal reading was abridged.

Vice mayor Steve Glazer spoke of Severson's creation of the Orinda Community Foundation to meet the growing funding needs of Orinda's nonprofit organizations, and credited her with spearheading "the successful plan to fix Orinda's roads, minimizing auto repair expenses in Orinda for years to come." Council Member Victoria Smith cited Severson's creation of the Everyday Heroes Golf Tournament, the Orinda Kids' Triathlon, and the community-wide cleanup event, Orinda Action Day, as well as Severson's efforts "to improve transparency and community access to the inner workings of local government by hosting a series of brown bag lunches that included tours of city facilities and city departments."

Council Member Amy Worth added further texture, recalling her work with Severson and others 20 years ago on the Orinda school facilities bond campaign. "I'll tell you there was not a more incredibly devoted school board member than any-

body could ever ask for in terms of helping us lead that effort to restore and improve the Orinda schools.

And that's the kind of person Sue is. She takes any job that's handed to her and is heads and shoulders above all the rest of us - does such an amazing job, including so many people in the work that you do."

Local nonprofit leaders and residents also rose to praise Severson, and Glazer led a slide presentation with photographic highlights of the retiring mayor's career before turning over the podium to her one final time.

"We have much to celebrate this evening," said Severson as she began her remarks. "Orinda's been ranked as the second most friendly city in America; it's also in the top 10 best cities for young families in northern California, and also among the safest cities in California." She applauded the city's history of fiscal prudence, and praised council and staff for steering a smooth course even as Orinda recovered from several rain-induced emergencies over the years. She also praised the coming together of Orindans to pass June, 2014's \$20 million bond initiative, Measure J. "Com-

bined with Measure L - the sales tax, and our city's annual repair dollars and also, fortunately, a few grants, we will provide a record over \$8 million in infrastructure improvements this next year. No small task that we've long strived for."

Severson also cited the impact made by improved communications tools, including the live streaming of council meetings. "As I retire from the city council, I will miss the camaraderie of the council," she said, "but certainly not a calendar filled with meetings. It's time for this grandma to say goodbye to politics, and hello to longer vacations with my husband, Ralph, and enjoying many more frequent hugs from my grandchildren."

Following a standing ovation for Severson by the sizeable crowd, city clerk Michele Olsen administered the Oath of Office to the three Orindans elected in November to four-year council terms - newcomer Eve Phillips, Worth and Orr. Glazer and Smith were then unanimously chosen by the council to serve, respectively, as mayor and vice mayor for 2015.


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