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Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer - Paying It Forward

By Laurie Snyder



The recent news regarding the Obama administration's efforts to improve relations with Cuba was heartening to Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer and family. "My wife's family came from Cuba so we share a special bond with the island. We still have relatives who live there and we have traveled to see them so we have a firsthand account of their struggles over the years. I'm hopeful that the human condition will improve for the people of Cuba with the renewal of political relations." From left - the Glazer family: Ariel, Steve, Melba, and Alex. Photo provided

a few years and ended up marrying in June 1987. Our wedding was presided over by the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, with whom I had previously worked. Over the next few years, we moved between Los Angeles, Sacramento and the Bay Area due to her subsequent employment with the telephone company and arrived in Lamorinda in 1996 with two young children in tow. We chose Orinda because of its beauty, great schools and convenience to transit. I got involved in community matters pretty quickly, and was appointed to serve on the city's Parks and Recreation Commission in 1997. That same year I was asked to help the committee that was working to create the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) to improve public safety and paramedic services."

Six years later, he would become more intimately acquainted with MOFD's personnel than he could have ever imagined. "Little did I know it in 1997, but those new paramedics ended up being first on the scene with lifesaving care for me in 2003." That year, he was shot in the neck by a troubled youth firing a high-powered pellet rifle at passing motorists from the deck of an Orinda home. Glazer, who'd simply been out enjoying a drive with his family on Miner Road, was seriously wounded as a .17-caliber projectile pierced his body and lodged next to his spine - after narrowly missing his carotid artery. Police apprehended the shooter but, because pellet guns were classified as toys in the criminal code at that time, they were unable to charge the youth with negligently discharging a weapon. After his recovery from a two-hour surgical procedure to repair his wound,

"I want my year as mayor to be all about community collaboration and consensus building," says Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer. "We have our issues and challenges as a city but they are all achievable if we work constructively together in our common desire to protect and enhance this beautiful place. A day doesn't go by where I don't count my blessings and Orinda and its people are a cherished part of that gratitude."

Glazer is a big fan of Orindans - individually and collectively. The majority of those who live or work in the city are friendly and bighearted, he observes, "but their giving spirit is not always flamboyant or visible." Many donate money and volunteer hours to a wide range of philanthropic causes, but prefer to do so quietly because they believe in the maxim that to whom much is given, much is expected. "We have always found Orindans to be gracious and unpretentious. Our friends and neighbors are very generous with their time and resources to improve our community and to help others regionally and around the world. There is a great appreciation for the arts and embrace of cultural diversity. We feel very privileged to call it our home."

Glazer and his family have lived in Orinda for nearly two decades. "I met my wife while working for a State Assemblyman in 1984. She was his press secretary (a job I had previously held) and I was running his re-election campaign. We dated for

Glazer collaborated with then-California Sen. Tom Torlakson to legislate stiffer penalties for pellet gun attacks. Motivated by the paramedics' kindness and diligence, he also decided to "pay it forward" by playing a more active role in Orinda's governance.

On one recent day, Glazer spent an hour on the phone helping a fellow Orindan better understand how the city government works, and then shifted gears to make philanthropy-related telephone calls as a California State University Trustee before switching back into mayor mode. Driving out to Orinda's Lost Valley neighborhood, he surveyed and helped resolve a situation residents felt was blighting the area (see photos on p. A-7).

"Prior to a council meeting, a typical day is doing your homework on the issue at hand, asking questions of staff and talking with interested residents. When you serve as Mayor, you're responsible for providing feedback to staff in organizing activities and meetings, and have additional responsibilities to represent the city at community events and regional forums. You have to be mindful that in most cases you're not speaking for yourself, so you have to consider the opinions and expectations of your council colleagues. Half of the conflicts I see between residents or between residents and their city have to do with misunderstandings and not differences on substance. The question becomes, 'How we can engage and find common ground?'"

This is the second in a two-part series of interviews with Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer. To read part one, visit our online archives: www.lamorindaweekly.com.

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[back](#)

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