

Tireless Book Adventuress Takes Over Orinda Books

By Sophie Braccini



Maria Roden, the new owner of Orinda Books, looks forward to sharing her love of books with the Lamorinda community. Photo Sophie Braccini

The future of Orinda Books seemed uncertain as longtime owner Janet Boreta prepared to retire. The 38-year-old institution is true north for many Lamorinda book lovers and the place that roughly 100 book clubs call home. But an equally passionate woman stepped forward to assume the challenge of keeping the independent bookstore alive and vibrant – Maria Roden is enthusiastically making plans for the business that she and her husband now own.

“The official handover date was July 1,” beams Roden. “I plan to close for just two or three days during a quiet moment in August to get the flooring, paint and layout done. And then full speed ahead with organizing events, community partnerships, and selling books!”

After working at Orinda Books from 2006 to 2012, and then at Rakestraw Books in Danville, when Boreta’s retirement presented the opportunity Roden knew that acquiring the bookstore was the right choice. At the same time, Roden’s husband, Daniel, retired from Chevron. “He is my partner in this venture,” she says, “but his role will be more behind the scenes.”

Roden moved from England to

the United States in 1997, settling in Orinda with her family in 2001. Overseas, she was involved in public relations and communications. “I wanted to try writing, and I enrolled at Saint Mary’s College in the Creative Writing M.F.A. program,” says Roden, who graduated in 2006. “I discovered that I am a reader, not a writer,” she admits. “What I love is to share my passion for books with others; that’s why I started working in bookstores.”

It is hard for Roden to remain seated at a table for an interview – she constantly rises to fetch a book she recently discovered and wants to share or to guide one through the display of summer reads. This is a woman who just loves books; she reads several every week. When asked to name her favorite book, she answers that it is one of her latest reads, because there is always something new and wonderful to discover.

A brick and mortar bookstore can be a tough business to sustain, but Roden firmly believes that Orinda Books can be profitable. “When Janet (Boreta) owned the bookstore she might not have made a lot of profit, but the business was not in the red,” states Roden. She reckons that 40 percent of a bookstore’s revenue

comes during the holiday season. “For me this is not going to be a big money-making venture,” she adds, “but we definitely plan to keep it positive.”

“The bookstore couldn’t be in better hands,” says Molly Young, who worked with Roden at Orinda Books and now manages Mrs. Dalloway’s in Berkeley. “Maria (Roden) brings to Orinda Books an incredible energy, lots of experience and a great vision.” Young knows that running an independent bookstore is a great deal of work and she believes that Roden is capable of keeping an eye on the bottom line while retaining the store’s peaceful character.

Rhoden is keenly aware of the challenge posed by online bookstores, but both she and Young say they have noticed a renewed love for community bookstores, especially those that offer good customer service and next-day availability when books not in stock are ordered before noon.

“A community bookstore has a limited inventory,” explains Roden, although her shelves boast more than 10,000 books, “so it reflects the personalities of the owner and staff.” Roden is planning a “staff’s choice” section that will include brief book reviews. She is also seeking young readers who would like to read pre-released books and recommend choices in the youth section.

Roden plans to revitalize Orinda Books by engaging in an events and partnerships-based strategy. Also a director on the Saint Mary’s College Master of Fine Arts advisory board, Roden says she is starting to develop a partnership with the college. In addition, she hopes to deepen the connection with local schools and libraries. She wants to expand the store’s traditional author events to include more authors – some of whom she already knows, as well as popular authors she plans to invite when she thinks their work is genuine and fits the community.

Roden believes that what comes

first is building relationships with local readers. “I plan to be behind the counter as much as possible and on the floor giving advice when it is needed,” she says, adding that she enjoys being able to guide people to discover new territories.

“A bookstore is a place that says something about the community that sustains it,” says Rhoden. “I really believe in the power of books to create interactions, to learn, to discover. Everyone, of all ages, should have access to browsing inside a bookstore.”

Orinda Books

276 Village Square, Orinda
(925) 254-7606
www.orindabooks.com
New hours effective July 1:
Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

business briefs



BreatheMoveBeWell opening party in Orinda.

Photo Gaby Diskin

BreatheMoveBeWell

1 Northwood Dr., #4, Orinda

(510) 290-3428

www.BreatheMoveBeWell.com

Gaby Diskin and Bridget McCarthy recently celebrated the opening of their new Pilates holistic center in Orinda, BreatheMoveBeWell. The two women met while working at the Lafayette Health Club. “I’ve known Bridget for 10 years,” says Diskin, “and I often substituted for her when she was traveling. We both value Pilates and enjoy working together.” Diskin and McCarthy are certified instructors on Pilates equipment. McCarthy trained with Turning Point in Walnut Creek and Diskin did her training with BASI (Body Arts & Science International) in Australia. In their new space in Orinda they teach group reformer Pilates classes, up to five people, also private and duet sessions on the other Pilates equipment. “I specialize in back issues and scoliosis,” says Diskin. “I have had to work on this for myself and found the Pilates techniques with the machines the best approach to take care of my back.” She adds that McCarthy has a background in dance and that both of them work extensively on relieving imbalance in the spine, reestablishing alignment.

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The Beaubelle Group ranked among the top 1,000 realtors in the U.S. for home sales last year in a new report by The Wall Street Journal and REALTrends, a national communications and real estate consulting company. The group includes Glenn



From left: Agents Finola Fellner, Kellie Beaubelle, Lynn Molloy, Glenn W. Beaubelle and Nancy Stryker

Photo provided

Stryker, Lynn Molloy, and Cory Cook. “I couldn’t be more proud of these talented independent sales associates with the Beaubelle Group, who serve the East Bay market so well,” said Mike James, president of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage.

News from the Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

Monthly Entrepreneur’s Club meeting at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 17 in the Chamber Conference Room.

New member orientation is from 5:30 to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, July 22 at Bank of the West, 3583 Mt. Diablo Blvd.



The multi-chamber mixer at Cal Shakes in Orinda on July 9 was very well attended. Barbara Gilmore, of the Lafayette chamber, said it was a beautiful spot to have a mixer. Local restaurants provided delicious food. “All of the chambers had restaurant participation and Cal Shakes was very prepared with staffing and shuttle service – everything needed to make things run smoothly,” said the Moraga chamber’s Kathe Nelson. “The weather was windy and a bit chilly, but a good number of folks had never been there before,” she added.

Photo Jay Yamada

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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Celebrating an Anniversary?

If your business is celebrating a significant anniversary (5, 10, 20 years or more ...) send us a photo of your business, the owner(s) or the staff with specific information about your business and what you’re celebrating, and we’ll include it in an upcoming issue.