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Linda Ehrich  
Realtor  
93 Moraga Way  
Orinda, CA 94563  
925.698.1452  
Linda@LindaEhrich.com  
www.LindaEhrich.com  
DRE# 01330298



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## Chamber of Commerce Executive Director – Moraga’s ambassador



Photo Vera Kochan

**Kathe Nelson hard at work for Moraga’s businesses.**

### By Vera Kochan

Working out of the Chamber of Commerce’s tiny office, located in the Rheem Shopping Center, Executive Director Kathe Nelson makes big things happen for Moraga.

Nelson began her chamber career in 2009, when Edy Schwartz was president of the fledgling Moraga Chamber. Schwartz needed someone to work 10 hours a week helping with administrative duties.

Nelson joked, “My husband (Walter) said I was available.” Nelson’s previous

experience was working for consumer sales companies. “I’ve always worked in front of people, because I was in sales. Now I work behind the scenes, and I like that better.” Through time, her job responsibilities increased and by 2013 she earned the title of executive director.

Before moving to Clayton three years ago, Nelson and her family had been Moraga residents since 1974.

“The biggest misconception is that the chamber works for the town,” Nelson explained. “We are

supported by annual dues, profits from the annual Golf Tournament and the Community Faire. Our dollars are really stretched and we operate on a shoestring budget.”

Nelson feels that the chamber has made progress for the town through the years. “The influence of the chamber has expanded since I’ve started through the evolution of different boards. We’ve created a common entity where information could be exchanged and businesses could support each other.” She added, “We’ve become much more involved with the core of the town working with the planning commission and the town manager to attract businesses.”

She also states that the chamber has worked hard to increase the town/gown relationship with Saint Mary’s College. Every fall semester Nelson gives the chamber a strong presence during orientation events by letting the students know what’s available to them within the town.

One event that Nelson is co-creator of, along with past chamber president Frank Melon, is the annual Golf Tournament held at the Moraga Country Club and

heading into its eighth year. That and the annual Community Faire are her favorite events to coordinate. She also enjoys planning the Business and Business Person of the Year celebrations, because “it gives the community a chance to get involved in nominations and it’s a nice evening of honor.”

Nelson also attends Lamorinda chamber meetings where ideas are bounced around to include any possible tri-city events. She continually stays in contact with members of Chambers of Commerce of Contra Costa County (5C) to expand on possibilities that could be of interest to Moraga. She is either serving or has served on at least 19 Moraga related committees.

When asked if she has a wish list, Nelson responded, “That Moragans would understand the importance of supporting local businesses and to contribute to the town’s growth.”

Two newly created ventures designed to promote town business and sponsored by the chamber are the Jeanette Fritzky Case Study Foundation and the Small Business Catalyst Program. Both events, involving SMC business majors, were a huge success this past year. The More Moraga Grant Program

will most likely see a revival as well.

Moraga Chamber of Commerce President Bob Fritzky gives Nelson high praise for her efforts: “Kathe understood being a part of the Moraga Chamber had challenges versus other East Bay communities that may have a more robust business sector, but Kathe was determined to create high visibility for the chamber members.”

Fritzky also stated, “When the Chamber lost financial support from the town due to the challenges of the sinkhole and Canyon Bridge, Kathe Nelson requested a voluntary pay cut to continue what Kathe loves. The chamber members continue to grow under Kathe’s leadership (now up to 184 members).”

Moraga Shopping Center’s property owner Dave Bruzzone said, “Kathe has been a tireless worker in advocating for our business community. She is thoughtful and articulate in promoting the many diversified perspectives you’d find in our membership, while also voicing the common theme of the chamber’s importance in making us a better community.”

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[TheBeaubelleGroup.com](http://TheBeaubelleGroup.com)

[Glenn@TheBeaubelleGroup.com](mailto:Glenn@TheBeaubelleGroup.com)

CABRE# 00678426, 01165322

