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Outgoing and incoming Orinda Books owners honored by city council



New owner of Orinda Books, Pat Rudebusch, center, at city council meeting.

Photo Sora O'Doherty

By Sora O'Doherty

As history repeats itself Orinda Books is once again changing hands, and once again the new owner, Pat Rudebusch, has a history of working in the shop, which is an Orinda institution. Maria Roden similarly took over the bookstore after some years of working in it (and a little time working in another bookshop) in 2014. Roden's husband Daniel has retired, and for some time she has been commuting to their property in Carmel Valley.

Mayor Inga Miller, noting that "we are sad that we won't see Maria in the bookstore anymore," welcomed the new owner. Rudebusch said that Roden had invited her to work in the bookstore four or five years ago. Roden said that Rudebusch is friendly and chatty, perfect for the shop.

Council Member Nick Kosla said that for every 10 books he buys on Amazon, he reads one, while in contrast he reads every single book he buys at Orinda Books. Council member Amy Worth noted that Orinda Books is a bookstore that grew out of a book room. "I have loved the cooking program, the cultural programs," she said, and credited Roden with creating a great spirit. "Pat," she said, addressing Rudebusch, "as a former member of the Orinda Union School District, you understand the impor-

ance of books," and Worth offered her a "deep, deep thank you" for taking over the shop. To Vice Mayor Darlene Gee's hope that "we'll see more of the family working there," Rudebusch exclaimed, "Well, you will see Catherine!" Catherine is Rudebusch's daughter.

"It was a hard decision," Rudebusch said, "but my eldest daughter said, 'Mom! You have to - it's my childhood bookstore,'" and that, in addition to some careful analysis and thought, convinced her. "Maria had a professional, objective valuation of the business," Rudebusch said.

"Since I worked here for three years, I know the business and I'm comfortable," she said, but added, "I'm not looking for a great return on investment; I'm primarily motivated to keep a bookstore alive and thriving here in Orinda."

Rudebusch, who grew up and went to college in Chicago and in the past worked for the Public Broadcasting System, describes herself as a habitual volunteer at schools. She has worked at Orinda Books for the past three years, and before that was a frequent customer. She plans to continue what Roden has started. "Maria has built it into a thriving business and community, with author events, and artists of the month," she said. "I want to keep doing what Maria put in place but

also to evolve in response to community values, to keep up with changes, I don't want to be static," she added. She wants to keep the life and excitement that Maria injected into the store. For example, she wants to try to bring in more artists. Currently Gerry Wallace ceramics are featured at the shop.

"Orinda Books has worked, it has thrived in Orinda," Rudebusch notes. She attributes this to loyal customers who value local business, who understand that if you want to have local business downtown you have to support it. "They get it. Plus, I enjoy working here."

The new owner will keep current staff, who are all great at what they do, she says. The store has a staff of about 12, including some high school students who work part time. "Everyone who works here is local to the community," Rudebusch says. "Many have been with the shop for over 30 years. We want to keep that going. Such a wealth of knowledge. They know what customers like to read." She confessed to being "a little bit nervous." But she said, "I'm following in some pretty accomplished footsteps and everybody on staff is excited. I'm excited, customers are excited." Rudebusch officially takes over Oct. 1. She and her husband, Glenn, were welcomed aboard with a party at the shop on Sept. 14.

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Scandal rocks Moraga Community Foundation

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Fritzky also served as president of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce, but was removed from office shortly after his removal from the MCF board of directors on Sept. 3, at a special meeting in which Fritzky was not present. In a press release from Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kathe Nelson, she stated, "I assure the chamber members that the Moraga Chamber of Commerce finances have not been misappropriated in any manner. Mr. Fritzky was not involved in the financial dealings of the chamber and only had a co-check signing access for checks exceeding \$1,500. During his presidency of the Moraga Chamber, he only performed this function twice."

Chamber Vice President Larry Tessler has taken over the duties as president and assures that the chamber will continue business as usual.

In a press release put out by the town of Moraga, Mayor Roger Wykle said, "I am saddened for the losses incurred by the Moraga Community Foundation which impact the entire Moraga community. It is disheartening to hear that a civic leader might have betrayed the community trust in this fashion."

The town has cooperated with the MCF on behalf of the

community three times. In 2017, MCF held a fundraiser to help the MPD purchase and install a video surveillance system. According to the town's press release, "The receipt of those funds were audited and accounted for during the town's annual independent audit." MCF had proposed a donation of ADA-compliant restrooms for the Moraga Commons Park. At this time, the town has not received any of these funds. In March 2018, the town entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the former owner of the Rheem Theatre, in the hopes of a potential future acquisition of the theatre by MCF. The MOU expired in March with no agreement having been reached.

Speculation as to what may have become of any donations made to the American Cancer Society during the 2018 Jeanette Fritzky Tribute Walk was laid to rest by Moraga Vice Mayor Kymberleigh Korpus. Korpus stressed that the town council had no involvement with the Jeanette Fritzky Foundation or the Tribute Walk, and that she herself served as a volunteer only due to her friendship with the former council member and colleague.

Korpus said, "To my knowledge neither Bob Fritzky nor the Jeanette Fritzky Foundation had any connection to the chain of

command for the custody of the donations. Any donations made electronically went directly to the American Cancer Society." She added, "Money that was collected at the walk site was put into select buckets by two trusted volunteers, and delivered to the table where American Cancer Society workers took the funds and transferred them into a locked box. At the end of the day, the locked box was opened in front of two people, myself being one of them, and the money was counted and the information was written down on a list of donors. The information was then reported back to Bobbie Preston, a volunteer organizer. Some donations were collected by a Boy Scout troop, who in turn delivered them directly to the American Cancer Society."

MPD recommends doing a small amount of research when solicited by or giving to charities to help avoid scams and ensure donations are being used as intended.

Bob Fritzky was contacted for comment, and in a Sept. 9 email, he stated, "Unfortunately, I am not allowed to respond under orders from my attorney. I do have a call into him to see how he wants it handled. Will be in touch soon." To date, no further comments have been forthcoming.



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