

Orinda Historical Society Honors Members

By Andrea A. Firth



(Left to right) Award winners John Holmgren, Helen Vurek, and Charles Blue with Orinda Historical Society President Lucy Hupp Williams

Photo Kent Long

Over one hundred individuals attended the Orinda Historical Society's holiday dinner where residents Charles Blue, John Holmgren, and Helen Vurek were honored for their contributions to the history of Orinda. Blue, Holmgren, and Vurek were the first recipients of the Orinda Historical Society Award which recognized their ongoing support of the Society and its goals. "All of these people have been a great help to me personally," noted Historical Society President Lucy Hupp Williams, "and I know their presence and mentorship has been of great help to other members of the Board."

Charles Blue was a charter member of the Orinda Historical Society and worked to establish the organization over 38 years ago. He is a past President and current board member. "Charles has been a tremendous mentor to me," said Williams, "and he continues to be someone I can call with questions." Blue also served Orinda as a volunteer fireman and Chairman

of the Fire District for over 20 years.

"John Holmgren has extensive knowledge of the history and geography of California," noted Williams. As the longtime editor of the California State Automobile Association's monthly magazine *Motorland* (now *Via*) and host of a daily travel show on CBS radio, John spent his career helping Californians experience the state's rich history and extraordinary travel opportunities. Holmgren moved to Orinda in 1950 and quickly got involved with the Historical Society. "He's done a lot to educate Orindans," noted Williams. "He has led tours to historic sites. He has given travel talks. And, he's always willing to stuff envelopes," she added with a laugh.

An Orinda resident since 1939, Helen Vurek has made her own mark on Orinda's history. Now 97 years old, Vurek has been dubbed "the pioneer" within Historical Society circles. She has been a tireless volunteer for the Historical Society and several other organizations and helped to advance the evolution of Orinda as a community. She worked to establish the Orinda Dramateurs, the Democratic Club, and helped to found a child-care program at the Orinda Park Pool. "She always has helped with Historical Society events," said Williams. "She has just always volunteered. She just knew there was a need."

"All three of these individuals are willing to roll up their sleeves and do the work that needs to be done," explained Williams. "They have all helped to fold and stuff newsletters, identify and sort photos and papers, and much more." The award winners were feted in the Fellowship Hall at the Orinda Community Church with a catered meal. Local artist and longtime Orinda resident John Cleary entertained the guests with a presentation about his work in sculpture.