



Orinda City Clerk, Michele Olsen—Her Door is Open

By Andrea A. Firth



Michele Olsen, Orinda City Clerk

Photo Andrea A. Firth

Although she occasionally finds her ice cream melting in the shopping cart at the grocery store when she gets stopped by an Orinda resident who wants to ask a question, share information, or complain about an issue, Michele Olsen, Orinda's City Clerk, enjoys being the "go to" girl. "It's cool to be able to clarify the process for people," explains Olsen, whose youthful appearance and warm smile are balanced by her poised and professional demeanor. "My husband describes me as the celebrity in the family," she adds with a laugh.

Olsen, who grew up in Vacaville, and her husband, a Lafayette native, live in Orinda with their three young children. She started working in Orinda city government back in January of 2004 when she filled in as the Assistant to the City Manager. Olsen became passionate about city government, and two and half years ago stepped into the City Clerk position. "It was like a light bulb went on in my head that signaled to me that this is where I am meant to be," says Olsen, "plus the commute is great."

"The city of Orinda is really fortunate to have an individual that is as dedicated as Michele," said City Manager Janet Keeter. "We don't have many staff members that live in town, so Michele brings a unique perspective to the position."

Her easy-going manner and ability to deal with change seem to be key ingredients to her success as City Clerk. Olsen has already worked for three different City Managers and a host of different Council members during her tenure with the city. "I have been lucky to have so many amazing mentors," states Olsen with her omnipresent positive outlook.

Olsen's diverse background which includes volunteer recruitment, customer service, event planning, and human resources also seem to be a good fit for the many hats she wears as City Clerk. Among her many responsibilities, Olsen submits official filings for the city, handles all of the city's contracts, and serves as the liaison and scheduler for the Council, along with answering innumerable questions and requests from residents and businesses each day.

"Communication has been set forth as my priority this year," explains Olsen. She describes her office as having an open door, and she encourages residents to stop by City Hall to ask questions and share news. "Everything has to be transparent," she states emphatically. "Steve Glazer (former Orinda Mayor) calls me Switzerland," she adds. "It's my job to be neutral, to provide information, and to represent all groups."

In addition to serving as the city's communicator, Olsen is integrally involved with community outreach. She recently partnered with Orinda Union School District to facilitate the collection of letters that were submitted to legislators in Sacramento regarding the impact of the proposed budget cuts on the school system. She says the city booth at the Farmers' Market will be even bigger and better this season. And, she has plans for a voter outreach program to coincide with the November election.

"There are many good things on the horizon in Orinda," enthuses Olsen. "These new developments have taken some time, but there has been a lot of community input to the process, and it's now coming to fruition."