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Orinda Community Spirit on the Rise-Candidates for City Council Weigh in on Why

By Andrea A. Firth

Over the past year, Orinda has experienced a renaissance in community spirit. More Orindans are volunteering for causes, committees, and task forces to address the important issues that impact their City. More Orindans are regularly coming together in the streets and downtown areas to events that celebrate holidays, shopping, the arts, and their great City. Why now? What has moved Orindans from the comforts of their beautiful hillside homes to join forces in the heart of the City? As part of The Lamorinda Weekly's ongoing election coverage, we asked the candidates for City Council, incumbents Victoria Smith and Steve Glazer and newcomer Dr. Bob Larsen, to explain why they feel the community has made more of an effort to get to "know itself" recently and what it means for Orinda. Victoria Smith attributes the increased community spirit and excitement in Orinda to two reasons: the combined efforts of many residents on recent road bond measure campaigns and the City's collaboration with community groups on a number of key events. "Although we were not successful in passing a road bond measure, a substantial majority of the citizens of Orinda favored the measures and the two road bond campaigns involved hundreds of volunteers and brought people together to have a serious discussion about the values of Orinda and what needs to be done to come up with the funds to fix our roads," states Smith. "Our joint efforts [with community groups] have resulted in a number of great events like the weekly Farmers Market, the "Shop Orinda" campaign, the "Orinda Salutes Cal Shakes" event, and the wonderful donated art in our library plaza," she adds. Steve Glazer has seen and felt the increase in community involvement in his community. "We are seeing a great positive spirit and make-it-happen energy in Orinda, and it's electrifying," states Glazer. "The school community has always led the way with volunteerism, but we are now seeing that commitment and energy expand to improving civic life," he adds. Bob Larsen is all for Orinda's renewed community spirit and feels the upcoming Orinda Restaurant Tour is another good idea. "Individual businesses can participate in showcasing our town as well," states Larsen. "Consider the example being made by Ron Bonner of the Orinda House who has live music at a restaurant venue. No need to travel to Yoshi's," he adds. However, Larsen suggests that "for real success" the City should update their plan to include more attractive sites for Orindans to patronize. "While planning we must remember two special populations, seniors and teens," adds Larsen. "Our older residents are often ignored. Kids don't call this Borinda for no reason. New ideas can only help fuel the spirit." Lee Borrowman contributed to this article.

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