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Orinda Community Fund Takes Shape

By Andrea A. Firth

"I'm working very hard to raise private dollars to supplant the community funding that has been cut," states Orinda's Mayor Sue Severson as she describes the genesis of the Orinda Community Fund—a voluntary donation fund that enables residents to give tax-deductible contributions to the City to support community events and programs. During the annual budgeting process this past spring, Orinda's City Council, like municipalities across California, had to balance the city's budget in the face of reduced revenues and contributions from the state. Ultimately funding was cut to a number of community programs, which represented about \$20,000 of general fund expenditures annually. The Council remained committed to supporting events like Orinda Idol and the July 4th celebration and programs such as Art in Public Places, but they needed new financial resources and felt that the community would be willing to help. Severson stepped up to take on the Council's charge to create a plan to find private monies to fill the void. "Residents have always been able to make donations to the city," says Severson, noting that land and financial contributions have been given to the city in the past. The idea for a specific fund with a formal focus on supporting community programs was one of the recommendations of the Revenue Enhancement Task Force, she explains. Severson held a brainstorming session with interested community members to identify ways to raise money for the fund and in the process established some guidelines. "I did not want to hold fundraising events just as fundraisers, but I wanted to create events that would benefit the city," states Severson. Partnering with groups both in and out of Orinda was another key element along with taking care to avoid conflicts with existing fundraising events in the city. Already Severson has made connections and moved forward with some fundraising plans while she has been "testing the waters" with a few other ideas. Soon she will make a formal presentation to the City Council to get their feedback and support. Among the fundraising concepts in development are a kids' triathlon set for November 14th at Miramonte High School, a celebrity golf tournament tentatively scheduled for July of 2010 at Orinda Country Club, a 25th Orinda City Anniversary Gala, and an antiques appraisal event with Bonham and Butterfield. "All of these events are inclusive to all residents of Orinda and the surrounding communities," adds Severson. "I'm excited about all of the ideas and feel like these can go on as annual events."

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