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Editor:
The voters in Orinda have an opportunity to bring in new ideas to our City Council this November. Dr. Scott Zeller is a non-incumbent who is committed to preserving what is best about our town. He has no ties to developers. He instead will promote a "village" atmosphere in downtown while working cooperatively with small business. Scott is someone who considers the "semi-rural" nature of Orinda an attribute we must safeguard. There are forces in Orinda supportive of radically changing downtown. This will require amending our city plan which was wisely crafted by citizens with input from recognized urban planners. Multi-story buildings are proposed. Hillside views and existing merchants will be replaced by congestion and shadows. Dr. Zeller thinks we can do better. Scott and his wife Susan are Glorietta parents who treasure the excellent schools we have. Their son competes in OYA & OBA events. The boy doesn't want to see Europa evicted by development interests. Dr. Zeller will not be taking campaign contributions from real estate interests, developers, political action committees or businesses that contract with the City of Orinda. Can his opponents pledge to do the same? Don't bet on it. Scott is for transparency and eliminating conflicts of interest. I hope you will join me this fall and cast your vote for Dr. Scott Zeller for City Council. Consider withholding your other votes and by doing so send a message to City Council.

Dr. Bob Larsen
Orinda

Editor:
Today's economic climate is not conducive to business as usual. Creativity, leadership, and common sense are more important than ever, especially for those seeking to lead municipal governments. The residents of Orinda are fortunate to have such a candidate for City Council in Tom McCormick. Tom is currently serving as Mayor in the final year of his first term on the Orinda City Council. His business experience has provided the leadership to make tough decisions, like implementing an employee furlough program, in order to balance the budget. His creativity is seen in how he helped reorganize the administrative and financial departments to save the city \$75,000 without a reduction in service. He pressed for the "Art in Public Places" program at no cost to the city, and continued to make road improvements using State and Federal grant money whenever possible. Tom has also changed the tone of city staff. He has implemented various programs, including a customer service survey posted on the web site, to create a service-oriented philosophy in all departments. I have personally witnessed how he has improved the planning process so that it is easier and more user friendly to residents. Tom's common sense is on display as he is constantly reaching out to the community and other community leaders to elicit their involvement and creativity in solving the issues that face our city. In today's changing times, it is critical to have someone with Tom's understanding of our history in order to lead the city into the future. Please join me in returning Tom McCormick to the City Council this November.

Robert Jungbluth
Orinda

Editor:
Please join me in supporting Sue Severson for re-election to Orinda City Council. Sue, a former Orinda Citizen of the Year for her 9 years work on the Orinda Union School Board, is a tireless worker for all of the things that make Orinda a very special place. Over the years, our schools, our library, local transportation, the Boy Scouts, and now our city have been the lucky beneficiaries of her talents. Her emphasis on prudent fiscal management has helped keep Orinda in an elite group of California cities not currently facing fiscal disaster. But obvious challenges remain, and we need Sue's depth of knowledge, experience, energy, and commitment to guide Orinda going forward.

Carol Penskar
Orinda

Editor:
Most elected officials granted unsustainable pensions to employees. Now those agencies are laying off employees, cutting other services, and even considering bankruptcy. An exception was the Moraga Town Council, past and present, who managed taxpayer funds more responsibly and didn't grant these huge pensions. This has resulted in higher turnover in the police department but that is certainly better than cutting other services and potential town bankruptcy. I encourage the Town Council to continue to hold the line

Turtle Island – Not Your Usual String Quartet

... continued from page L1

Sounding anything but limited, he continues: "I like a wide swath. Honestly, what I do, is just play my violin, then go write it down." Moments later, he's on a reverse curve, saying, "I understand the need for good architecture. There's no reason for contemporary musicians to abandon the elements and principles of classical music." He's rather Beethovenian in his compositional constructions: outlining the overall form, calculating the

weight-bearing load on the listener's ear, eliminating excess. It's a far cry from the "play it and write" he first describes.

Testing the limits might be a Turtle Island signature. "This is the kind of music you choose by nature," says Balakrishnan. "Some people do one thing all the way. Others, find a wide-range and go for connections between things."

Mark Summer has been with Turtle Island from its debut 25 years

ago. "He's the premier crossover cellist on the planet," Balakrishnan says. "He's a cello, and a bass, and drums. He's a one man rhythm section."

Quartet member Mads Tolling appears to be an equally miraculous violinist. "Mads grew up listening to Keith Jarrett and Miles Davis. He has less of a fiddle style and more of the purity of the fine European players," Balakrishnan says. "And Jeremy," he says, referring to new member Jeremy

Kittel, "he grew up in the alternative tradition. He's special because he plays in an instinctive, grounded way."

String quartets and "down to earth" don't usually appear in the same sentence, let alone the same ensemble, but Turtle Island has never been usual. Their insatiable appetite for performing adds up to a blistering 50 performance gigs a year. Outreach is huge too, according to Balakrishnan. "It's about

sharing the craft with the community," he says. While bemoaning YouTube for "creating a glut, where, instead of things happening and then disappearing, they stay and stay," he applauds the online video-sharing site for its "immediate access."

To young musicians, he offers advice. "It's important you don't close off possibilities for your instrument. Don't run away from classical traditions, find your own

style, and go deep."



Like Beethoven's endings, finishing an interview with Balakrishnan isn't simple. He tosses out tantalizing, last-second comments, ("Half the importance of a string quartet is the composer, but people don't know it—" and, "I like a honking Hendrix chord; it stretches a listener's psyche,") before admitting he's late for lunch. It's a conversation cut short, leaving plenty of food for thought.

Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writers and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly.

All published letters will include the writer's name and town (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only), and should be 350 words or less.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: **Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570**

as it won't be long before the police being laid off by other cities will be seeking steady employment in Moraga.

Pete Williams
Moraga

Editor:
Citizens of Orinda, please join us in supporting Julie Rossiter for Orinda School Board. Julie's breadth of experience and knowledge make her the ideal candidate for this important role. Julie has children attending Orinda schools and understands the impact of the current financial crisis we are facing. She has spent years as an active participant in the classroom and the Del Rey Parents Club, serving as Treasurer of our fundraising drive for two years, Co-Chair of Operations on the school auction, Co-Chair of the annual parents gathering, Representative of the parcel tax campaign, and is the current Del Rey Legislative Representative to the Las Trampas Creek Council. She is also a practiced litigator who specialized in employment law. She knows how to roll up her sleeves and dig in to the issues at hand. She has significant experience solving difficult problems and is skilled at negotiating with others, in a positive, collaborative manner, and will be the advocate we need to build consensus and obtain results. In addition, she is a wonderful person – a kind, thoughtful, engaged mother, friend, wife and active member of our community – the type of person we want representing us and our children. Julie will focus on maximizing public and private sources of school funding, continuing to improve the curriculum and providing students and teachers with the resources needed to excel in today's society. Julie is endorsed by all five current members of the Orinda School Board: Jack Bontemps, Matt Moran, Pat Rudebush, Riki Sorenson and Pam West. We support Julie Rossiter for Orinda Schools and urge you to do the same. The Orinda School District, our children, and the community as a whole, will benefit from her experience, commitment and leadership. Sincerely
Seanna and Jeff Allen
Orinda

Dear Editor,
For several years I have, attended meetings and workshops related to the downtown revitalization plan. I am not a developer, and I have no financial stake in the eventual outcome, yet, surprisingly I was still able to find my way to these "insider" meetings and participate in the process. I am a twenty year resident of Orinda who has had the good fortune to raise a family here. I believe we have an obligation to plan well for future generations. Land is scarce in Orinda, and what little we have should be used wisely. Whether we like it or not the human race is expanding. Should Orinda completely ignore the changing demographics and pass the burden of building more housing to other communities? I think not. I did not come to Orinda to cut myself off from the outside world. The downtown areas on both sides of the freeway are in need of a facelift. The town looks tired and shabby. I like the idea of building residential units on top of retail. In England, where I am from, all the towns and villages are like this. Given the proximity to BART and the freeway, I think this type of housing will appeal to a variety of people including empty nesters, middle age, and young professionals. It would be a shame to let the building height issue derail this. Fear mongering from those opposed to change is rife with inaccuracies. They talk about turning Orinda into Manhattan with skyscrapers or the destruction of small businesses and life, as we know it, traffic nightmares, underhanded dealings by local officials, and greedy corrupt developers. Scott Zeller, who is their chosen leader, has surrounded himself with some who constantly rage against anything that is supported by government for the good of the community such as schools, libraries, and roads. They fill the editorial pages week after week with "the sky is falling" scenarios. They see corruption and conspiracy in every corner. I want people on the council who have a vision beyond their own backyard. I know one candidate I will not be supporting and that is Scott Zeller.

Valerie Sloven
Orinda

Editor:
I am beyond incensed at the recent Acalanes high school graduate who felt entitled to steal hard working peoples' tips from the tip jar and then drive off in a Mercedes sports car. Perfect display of entitlement and disregard for others' labor from a no doubt over privileged youth. Hide your change, boys and girls, at your lemonade stands.

Charlotte Crogran
Lafayette

Dear Editor,
There is lots of talk today about city employees being overpaid, underperforming in their jobs and city offices being overstaffed. Some of this, I am sure, is fueled by our still sputtering economy, and – doubtless – there are certainly employees (and individual cities) who fit this description in our public sector just as there are in private business; my guess would be in somewhat equal measure. I am a resident of Michael Lane in Lafayette and over the summer the City took on and completed the long-overdue task of fixing our dilapidated street and drainage problems. I can only speak for myself, but I believe most neighbors agree, that the City should be congratulated on doing an outstanding job in the planning, execution and post-construction work. It was handled in a professional fashion, including dealing diplomatically with the inevitable hiccups that we all expect in any large construction job, including a few cranky neighbors with specific needs and concerns. (I am afraid my hand is up for being one of the cranky ones.) I believe part of the reason the project was a success is that the City of Lafayette has hired very competent and able employees. I have no idea what anyone is paid, but I for one want top-notch people working in my city and enough personnel to manage and run this city well. I remember an old company slogan for a premium quality line of hand tools was "I would rather explain the price of quality than apologize for something less." Yes, of course a close eye has to always be kept on running a city – our City – in a lean and very fiscally responsible way, especially in these challenging economic times. The evidence points to Lafayette doing this. But I also want Lafayette to continue to be one of the real gems of the Bay Area to live in, and well-qualified and talented city personnel play a critical role in making it a reality.

Larry Challacombe
Lafayette

Editor:
On September 7th I, along with several other neighbors, I attended the Moraga Planning Commission meeting. I left the meeting asking myself "what happened?" The discussion was such a pendulum swing in opinion; I left feeling dismayed and disheartened at our city politics. Several individuals expressed concern with the Dollar Tree citing significant lawsuits against the Dollar Tree for selling merchandise containing illegal amounts of lead and cadmium, the impending reduction in our property values, limited tax dollar revenue to the city, and frustration over the Commission's acceptance of another LARGE retailer in lieu of the development of locally owned business. The commissioners opened their remarks stating that they agreed that the Dollar Tree was not a desirable addition to the community but that they were restrained by the framework of the Municipal Code. However, they proceeded to discuss how they could convince each other how to get to a "yes" vote. Really? After further discussion, the commission realized that for various reasons the majority of the commissioners were inclined to vote "no" on the acceptance of the application. After, formally voting the application down... the Planning Director (Lori Salamack) informed the commission that they didn't perform the vote correctly. Her direction was so confusing that the commissioners didn't feel comfortable voting no. Based on language... not principal or the framework of the code, the application was going to be accepted! After continued discussion everyone was so thoroughly confused the decision was passed to a sub-committee of 2 individuals to come up with acceptable language to again, get to a "yes" vote! Again, why is the planning commission trying to convince itself that it must be a "yes"? It can be a No... IT SHOULD BE A NO!

For all the reasons listed above and all the reasons we know in our heart. This is a cheap merchandiser whose revenue is generated primarily through expansion. It does not have a commitment to this community, it sells dangerous and sub-standard product and let's face it... It sells CRAP. Crap that will fill our landfills with things that won't degrade until our great-great-grandchildren have great-great-grandchildren. And when they leave, and they will leave, we will be left with an empty retail space ready to accept ANOTHER large retailer and we will never get back to a vision we all have. Diverse businesses that service Moraga and the surrounding community in a thoughtful way. We are a community of individuals who have high standards for the maintenance of our open space, the maintenance of our individual residence and the education offered at our schools. We need to have those same high standards when it comes to retail for this community. Sincerely,
Kathy Macchi
Moraga

Join our Public Forum

If you have significant knowledge about an issue facing Lamorinda or one of its cities that requires more than the 350 words to which we must limit Letters to the Editor, don't despair! You can submit your letter to our Public Forum section. Just send your letter to **letters@lamorindaweekly.com** and let us know you'd like to be considered for the Public Forum.