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Moragans Called Upon to Create a Vision for Rheem Center

By Sophie Braccini



Renee Zeimer will ask people to list, on this board, what they love about the Town of Moraga Photo Sophie Braccini

itself in terms of charm and appeal, but the plan is to focus on its existing positive traits and build from what works. This brainstorming method is called Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

Zeimer used to work for the city of Walnut Creek as a Program Analyst for the City Manager. She participated in AI sessions there and experienced how they created a positive involvement of residents in the management of the city's affairs. "It resulted in very practical things that residents devised to address the issues at hand," remembers Zeimer, "it helped avoiding polarization and made working with city's government more effective."

Moraga Mayor Karen Mendonca has also worked with similar methods. "I'm familiar with this communication technique that helps all ideas come the forefront," says Mendonca, "it's a way to get out many ideas without negative comments, and it can prove very productive." The Mayor plans to participate in both sessions.

In their book, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*, authors Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom describe the different steps of the method that was created by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva at Case Western Reserve University in 1987 as a tool for organizational change. The first step consists in exploring the best of what life gives to a given system- the appreciation part- then imagining what opportunities the future can bring-the inquiry. The process continues until it produces the design of an ideal organization, and defines the steps to delivering the vision. "Appreciation and inquiry combine to produce a vital, powerful and catalytic effect on leadership and organization," wrote Whitney.

"This is our town, and it is our job to make it whatever the people want," says Zeimer. "We already have a lot of material, we need to start to try things to attract businesses to visit Moraga so they can see that there is a potential for profit here."

Residents of all ages are encouraged to come and participate in the process. "People have the power to change things," says Zeimer, "they just have to come (to a meeting) and make it happen."

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Moraga's Rheem Center is a place to shop, go to the movies or have dinner, but it's not necessarily a place Moragans dream about. However, the Town committee that's tasked with reviving that area is challenging residents to do just that: imagine what Rheem Center could be, giving the committee some informal guidelines that it can use to amend the Municipal Code and manifest the Rheem dream.

Residents can choose between two scheduled sessions, the first on Saturday, August 27, from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., and another on Monday, August 29, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. - both sessions will be held at the New Rheem Theatre. Sign up online now at www.moraga.ca.us or by calling (925) 888-7038. ... "We want people to dream but not to fantasize," says Renee Zeimer of the Economic Development Action Committee, who has been working on the method and setting of the workshops, "First we'll ask residents to focus on what can be done on the short term - the low hanging fruit; then to expand their vision to the long term of the Rheem area."

Zeimer, who is one of the three volunteers who were recruited by the Town to share the role of Economic Development Director (with Mary Coe and Rich Larsen), would like to put Moraga on the map and she sees the Rheem Center as a vital piece to create a sense of place in Moraga. The old shopping center does not have much to show for