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Published March 14th, 2012

Richard Westin Orinda Citizen of the Year, 2012

By Andrea A. Firth



Richard Westin (2nd from right) with his son Forrest, daughter Alexis, and wife Pamela. Photo Ohlen Alexander

coaches of Miramonte's varsity women's tennis team. "I love sports. I love kids. Being a coach is natural extension of that," Westin said.

He joined the ranks of civic volunteer serving seven years on the Orinda's Parks and Recreation Commission, which is where he first met and worked with Orinda's current mayor, Steve Glazer. From there Westin served a three-year term on the Planning Commission during which time he spent countless hours in meetings for the Planning Process Review Task Force working to overhaul the city's development process guidelines. Despite the many hours and occasionally contentious meetings, Westin described his time on the Planning Commission without hesitation and with his ubiquitous smile. "It was the best volunteer job I had with the city."

A native of New York City, Westin ventured west to attend law school at U.C. Berkeley. Upon graduation he and a law school pal opened a private practice in Berkeley, and although they did not have a single client between them, Westin was not phased. "I'm an entrepreneurial soul," he said, "I don't mind walking the streets and chatting with people." And that was exactly what he did to network and find some business.

Westin had rarely ventured to the east side of the Berkeley hills and had never heard of Orinda when he and Pamela were house hunting in 1972. "I loved the small town, semi-rural feel of Orinda from the get go," he said. The couple bought what they thought would be a starter home in Orinda's El Patio neighborhood and 40 years later they still live in the same house, although it has grown to two to three times its original size.

"When we moved to Orinda, I think there was one traffic light," Westin said. Even with the addition of a few more lights, he noted that the population has remained fairly static and the city has retained its small town feel. If Westin could change one thing in Orinda, it would be to redevelop the commercial strip centers to a more interesting architectural and pedestrian-friendly design. Yet he remains enamored with Orinda overall. "Orinda is so centrally located and yet so rural at the same time. Every time I drive along Highway 24 and see the green or yellow hills, depending on the time of year, and the theater marquee pop into view I think, 'Wow I am lucky to live here.'"

Westin moved from law to commercial real estate development and about 25 years ago founded a company that owns and operates assisted living facilities. His son Forrest joined the business about eight years ago. He maintains a busy schedule between work, volunteering, and his five-mile jaunts with his Aussiedoodle name Tazze. Plus he plays tennis three times a week with guys who are almost half his age. "Every once in awhile," said Westin with a laugh, "the 70-year-old beats the young men."

Westin is very proud that the Orinda Community Foundation has raised over \$40,000 a year for the past two years to support programs and events in the city like the art in public places program and the July 4th parade. But he's not quite ready to stop there and has a goal in mind. "We can reach \$100,000 in a year. I know we can."

"For me this is the pinnacle. . . . Raising and distributing money through the Foundation for the many good causes in my community."

"It's you," said Pamela Westin.

"I'll never forget when Pamela said those two words," said Richard Westin as he sat outside Cafe Teatro in the Orinda Library Plaza sipping a diet coke on an unseasonably warm March afternoon. Westin, comfortably dressed in shorts, a denim shirt, and straw hat, had just returned with his wife from a five-week trip to the far reaches of South America. Both keen amateur photographers, the Westins were traveling and shooting the Patagonian landscape when Pamela downloaded the email announcing that Richard had been named Orinda's Citizen of the Year. "I was shocked to learn it was me," Westin said.

Others might not be so surprised. For the 40 years Westin has lived in Orinda he has volunteered actively and constantly-in the public schools, for kids' sports teams, on city commissions, and most recently he helped to establish the Orinda Community Foundation.

With his two children, Forrest and Alexis, 16 years apart in age, Westin admits he has been around Orinda's schools and sport fields for a long time. In addition to working on several school budget and site committees, he estimates that he has coached over 60 kids' sports teams over the years. And he currently serves as one of the

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[back](#)

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