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Runaway Librarian Settles in Moraga

By Sophie Braccini

There is a twinkle in the eye of Diane McDonnell, Moraga's new librarian - a spark that promises interesting surprises for residents. A long time Placer County librarian, McDonnell's worked in branch libraries and on the administrative side of the public library system. But she and her husband wanted to run away. Not from their children and grandchildren in Placer County, but from their lives there. "We were ready for the next adventure," she says. "We wanted some unpredictability in our lives." Contra Costa County Library asked her which of four libraries with openings she would like to work at and she chose Moraga.

"I researched statistics about the different municipalities and set my heart on Moraga," says McDonnell. "I got the sense that the library was important to the community here. I also saw many values that are important to me like family, open space, individualism."

For McDonnell and her husband, who is also a librarian, this is a return to the Bay Area. "I was raised in the Santa Clara/Los Gatos area," she says. "I looked into what the Contra Costa County Library had to offer because it has such a reputation for excellence and innovation."

In Placer County, McDonnell went from a position in a branch to a headquarter management position. "I was in charge of personnel, purchasing, budget and facilities," she says. In that position she acted as a project manager for the construction of new libraries in Meadow Vista and Rocklin. "It was very interesting and diverse, but I was missing the branch work and relationship with the public," she says.

In Moraga she plans to work behind the counter as often as possible and not spend too much time at her desk in the back office. She wants to get to know the collections and the vast network that allows patrons to get books from any of the branches in the county system. McDonnell also expects to spend a lot of time planning activities in partnership with the Friends of the Library. "This group has such a great reputation throughout Contra Costa," she says. "I'm looking forward to working with them."

She is interested in both the adult and children programs. "The children's programs are of great importance to me, supporting early literacy is very rewarding," says McDonnell. She remembers the first time she participated in a 'Paws to Read' program in Placer County. "It brought tears to my eyes," she admits.

"My personal interests are very diverse, from contemporary folk music to travel all over the world," she says, "but before planning programs I want to get to know the community." She has ideas about computer classes, literary presentations with authors and culinary/recipe swap meets; but will first get a feel for Moraga's needs.

McDonnell looks over her new domain with the critical eye of a project manager. "It looks like the building is well maintained and that renovations have been made to preserve its charming character," she says. She enjoys the wildlife that roams by her window, up the hill behind the library. "Here it's just deer, the occasional cow and a few turkeys; we don't have to worry about bears," says the librarian, who's obviously used to dealing with all kinds of situations.

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