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Orinda Named the Second Friendliest Town in America by Forbes Lamorindans using social media to foster neighborhood involvement

By Laurie Snyder



Enjoying friends and warm treats at the Orinda Library's Caffè Teatro on a recent chilly day are, from left: Kirstin Ricker, Cash Ricker, Callum Glynn, Grant Ricker, Duncan Glynn, Kendall Glynn, and Emery Glynn. Photo Ohlen Alexander

groups, council members, and locals displayed their civic pride via email and Twitter.

According to the announcement by Morgan Brennan on Forbes.com, Forbes looked at "500 small metro areas with populations between 5,500 and 150,000." Towns were ranked based on their charitable giving, low crime rates, number of college graduates and percentage of owner-occupied homes. Orindans donate roughly five percent of their annual revenues to charity - a fairly significant source of support for non-profit organizations when you consider the community's median income level. The city also just happens to be the fifth safest in California (first for its size category, according to the FBI).

Education levels were assessed, said Brennan, because "research has found that college-educated folks typically display more civic engagement, with higher rates of voting and volunteering." Communities with higher percentages of owner-occupied homes were ranked higher because "studies have shown a direct correlation between homeownership and neighborhood stability."

Forbes partnered with Nextdoor.com to create its final list. "Since Nextdoor is connected to thousands of neighborhoods across the U.S. that use our service to create happier and friendlier places to call home," said Kelsey Grady, the company's Senior Communications Manager, "it made sense to help Forbes analyze the available data."

The San Francisco-based social media company describes its mission as "[bringing] back a sense of community to the neighborhood." Nextdoor offers its users a variety of tools to create private social networks, customized to suit the unique character and needs of their respective neighborhoods. Sleepy Hollow residents are active on their site, said Grady, as are 19 other Orinda neighborhoods. "In Lafayette we have 18 neighborhoods on Nextdoor and in Moraga we have 10."

Chris Maher and his Campolindo neighbors use their site to send alerts regarding burglaries and other safety issues in Moraga, post minutes of board meetings and other documents, and also reach out about upcoming garage sales and for help with missing pets. "We've found lots of dogs," he said. Using the site is also proving to be an environmentally friendly alternative to the event flyers and lost puppy posters that often end up littering streets and fouling waterways in other areas. Now roughly half of Campo neighbors connect via email blasts and text messages through their private Nextdoor site.

While there were a few naysayers when Forbes named its friendliest towns, most comments in the Twitterverse were upbeat. Ryan, also known as @steezysee, wrote that it was a "Great day to be an Orindan."

And @Orindaproblems happily Tweeted the social media equivalent of a fist bump with the hashtag "#GoodForUs"? It really was a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

Resources to Make It an Even More Beautiful Day in Your Neighborhood

Compassionate Cities Campaign: compassionateaction.org/cities

"Imagine what our real neighborhoods would be like if each of us offered, as a matter of course, just one kind word to another person. There have been so many stories about the lack of courtesy, the impatience of today's world, road rage and even restaurant rage. Sometimes, all it takes is one kind word to nourish another person. Think of the ripple effect that can be created when we nourish someone. One kind empathetic word has a wonderful way of turning into many." - Fred Rogers

Orinda recently received a Mister Rogers-sized warm fuzzy from Forbes, the venerable publication which has been "Devoted to Doers and Doings" since its founding in 1917. When the business news outlet announced its rankings for "Friendliest Towns in America" on Dec. 19, Orinda was awarded the silver medal.

Yes, you read that correctly. Orinda is the second friendliest city in the nation.

"I wasn't surprised given our low crime rate and residents' high level of civic engagement and generosity," said Mayor Amy Worth, who pointed to Orinda's annual Fourth of July Parade, festivals, and other civic activities as key reasons that the city is "a great place to live."

Orinda City Manager Janet Keeter promptly fired off a press release while area coaches, realtors, non-profit

Conversations on Compassion - Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education: ccare.stanford.edu/events/upcoming

Fetzer Institute for Love and Forgiveness: www.fetzer.org/

TED - Ideas Worth Spreading: www.ted.com



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