

Civic News Moraga

Dick Olsen, Moraga's 2013 Citizen of the Year

... continued from page A5

Olsen continues to serve on the board of these non-profits, "I was never asked to leave a board," he said with a smile. He also serves on the board of the Eye Research Foundation at UCSF Medical School.

Although Olsen's experience with Bay Area non-profits is impressive, he is Moraga's Citizen of the Year for another reason - his service to the town of Moraga.

"Thirty years ago I rode my bike to give a letter in support of my father becoming Citizen of the Year," recalled Olsen's daughter, Jennifer, at the award dinner. "It looks like it took you guys a really long time to act on it!"

Olsen's contributions began before the town's inception.

"When I moved to Moraga in '72 it was for the schools," said Olsen, who raised two children here; with his first wife, then as a single father, and finally with Candace, now his wife of 30 years.

He says the fact that Moraga was not incorporated became a concern when condominiums started sprouting up on the ridgelines and it became clear to him that the county's strategy was to make Moraga a community of condos and townhomes.

"The project that would have built freeways through Moraga had already been abandoned for a while when we moved here," he said. "Still, Moraga was set to grow to a size and

with a model that was not what we were expecting."

Olsen found out that the town had a community association and he joined it. This group represented the town at county planning meetings, trying to stop the new projects. "They tried to put us at the end of the agenda to wear us down; but the three of us, Mike Cory (who would become Moraga's first mayor), Merle Gilliland and I kept at it," recalled Olsen. When a project for 1,000 condos, in what is now Sanders Ranch, came up for approval, 100 citizens showed up and asked for a moratorium on all Moraga projects until a transportation study could be completed. The county gave up and told Moragans that the best thing would be for them to incorporate.

Olsen was one of a dozen founders of Citizens Incorporating Moraga. After the town was incorporated, Olsen didn't run for town council. "I do not like to campaign," he said, but he continued to serve in many functions including a study of what police and fire services would be needed for the new town. "People today do not know that if Moraga is a safe place to live, it is thanks to Dick and all the study work he did that led to Moraga having its own police and fire departments," said Gordon Nathan, calling Olsen Moraga's "best kept secret" and noting, "It is also

thanks to him that Moraga had the first joint fire/paramedic services in the East Bay."

Fire safety and emergency response hold a special place in Olsen's life that traces back to his father who, during World War II, was the oldest un-drafted man in Millbrae and served his town as a volunteer firefighter. "He would take me to the station with him when I was very young," Olsen said. "Then during my college years at Stanford I was a volunteer firefighter and relief hoseman." He even completed the firefighter recruit academy. During his military years he received advanced emer-

gency medical training and served at Letterman Army Hospital.

When Moraga decided to form an independent fire district, Olsen was nominated and served on the board of directors for 12 years. He was also on the study committee that recommended the addition of Orinda to the Moraga Fire District to form the MOFD in 1997. He was elected to the MOFD board in November of 2010, but resigned in March of 2012.

His competencies and self-acquainted perfectionism make him a go-to person in Moraga when the town wants to have something done. After chairing the Revenue Enhance-

ment Committee that was created in 2009 he turned his attention, and marketing expertise, to road repair and public outreach—culminating in the passage of Measure K, the 1 percent sales tax for the roads that recently took effect.

Olsen is also an accomplished concert pianist.

Council member Mike Metcalf drew from Deborah King's 10 Qualities of a Being a Gentleman to offer an emotional portrait—it seems that Olsen's integrity, respect for others, confidence, and wisdom are what make so many people proud to call him a friend.

Is Moraga Unsustainable?

... continued from page A4

According to planning staff there is no plan at this time to actually develop the area. "We shouldn't [just] have funding linked to the actual provision of new housing," said Mayor Dave Trotter. "Instead there should be grants eligible for funding if they might spur the developer to act. Having the possibility to access that money for infrastructure in the PDA would provide that one property owner an incentive to develop."

Moraga will submit its comments to MTC, with copies to CCTA and ABAG, asking that grants not be tied to the number of housing units actually built when the decision to develop is not in the town's hands but rather be granted to infrastructure projects as a means to support potential developers. The town will ask that allocation of Measure J money not be linked to PDAs.

One Bay Area is a long-range transportation and land-use/housing joint initiative of the San Francisco Bay Area's main regional government agencies. The **Association of Bay Area Governments** and the **Metropolitan Transportation Commission** have joint responsibility for the project and they work in coordination with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Bay Conservation and Development Commission and other local agencies.

Priority Development Areas (PDAs) are locally-identified, infill development opportunity areas. To be eligible to become a PDA, an area has to be within an existing community, near existing or planned fixed transit or served by comparable bus service, and planned for more housing.

Association of Bay Area Governments plans for regional housing needs and it approves the designation of PDAs.

Metropolitan Transportation Commission is the transportation planning, coordinating and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area; its board includes local elected officials—the current chair is Orinda mayor Amy Worth. MTC decides which types of projects will be funded.

Contra Costa Transportation Authority manages the county's transportation sales tax program and does county-wide transportation planning. It will be responsible for programming \$45.2 million in federal funds available for Contra Costa County. The One Bay Area plan requires that 70 percent of the funds in Contra Costa must be spent in or near designated PDAs.

Civic News Orinda

New Boulder at Lake Cascade



Photo Andy Scheck

looking the lake, along with a plaque. In addition, members also recently showcased their Centennial Tree Project in Philadelphia at the Garden Club of America's Annual Meeting. This project was also honored in 2012 with Mayor's Award for Excellence in Community Beautification. "The citizens of Orinda are very lucky to have Lake Cascade," said Diana Kennedy, the club's Lake Cascade Tree Project Chairman. Kennedy hopes to see even more walkers and bicyclists out enjoying the natural beauty of this increasingly popular spot for both contemplation and recreation as the weather continues to warm. *L.Snyder*

The members of the Orinda Garden Club continue their efforts to beautify the community's Lake Cascade area on behalf of area residents. This large boulder, donated by the Orinda Country Club, has been placed near the cork oak trees behind the tennis courts over-



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