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The Road to Public Service

Getting to know Orinda's Tonya Gilmore

By Laurie Snyder



Tonya Gilmore and Janet Keeter Photo Ohlen Alexander

If information is truly an engine of democracy, then one of Lamorinda's newest city employees is likely to become a familiar and trusted face behind the wheel. Tonya Gilmore, hired March 13 to serve dually as the city of Orinda's public relations representative and assistant to the city manager, will function as the lead project manager on key city issues, help City Manager Janet Keeter with strategic planning and budget initiatives, and provide guidance to staff regarding the myriad reports, letters, and other communications which maintain the transparency of Orinda government operations each year.

As the public information officer, Gilmore will be the staff liaison to the Central Contra Costa County Solid Waste Authority and Orinda Chamber of Commerce, as well as the primary point of contact for statewide and national news media. She is also responsible for communicating traffic alerts, such as the recent heads up to residents about the downed power line near McDonnell Nursery.

What many Orindans may not realize about her job, however, is that she will also be the contact for city employees regarding information technology (IT) and phone services. "It's a lean organization," explains Gilmore. Every

employee is charged with keeping multiple "balls in the air."

Happily married with two sons, Gilmore is a Saint Mary's graduate with a Bachelor's degree in business management who was well equipped professionally to hit the ground running on her first day. As a former executive assistant to the west coast regional manager of an insurance company, she managed office operations, purchased equipment, and even functioned as the in-house tech person for this firm which navigated the often challenging waters of expansion. The job "gave me a good basis for doing many varied things all over," she says.

Gilmore then entered the tech world. As a program manager, she collaborated with writers to produce white papers sparking industry buzz about product releases. During this time, she began realizing that "satisfaction doesn't linger" in the high tech arena, and noticed that other marketing professionals were leaving to find greater fulfillment in public service. "I decided to do something where my work actually makes a difference to people," says Gilmore.

She landed a management analyst job in engineering with the city of Benicia's public works division, where personnel manage a wide range of programs and services on behalf of the community's 28,000 residents - including that city's own wastewater treatment plant. "Most people don't think about the part of local government that helps them the most," says Gilmore of public infrastructure. There is tremendous satisfaction for public employees who make water treatment plants safer, or secure grants which fund road improvements and build new bike paths.

Gilmore stayed in Benicia for 11 years, spending the final four of her tenure supporting the city manager. And then the Orinda job announcement caught her attention.

She's looking forward to using the diverse skills she's developed over the years to help residents find answers to their questions and interact effectively with City Hall. Ultimately, she hopes to become a "go-to girl" who can be depended upon to get the job done. "If you'd like more information or need help navigating the website," says Gilmore, "I'm ready to help."

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