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Training Tomorrow's Leaders

By Sophie Braccini

It often happens that great ideas evolve from random circumstance. Maura Wolf, of the Saint Mary's College Leadership Center, lives in Moraga next door to Cathy Harris, who is the daughter of Edy Schwartz, former president of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce. In the fullness of time, this led to meetings with Jill Keimach, Moraga's town manager, and to brainstorming about how to involve and inspire the next generation of local leaders. Their ideas translated into a three-part leadership seminar series - the first, which will be held on Thursday, Sept. 26, is titled, "Increasing Engagement and Deepening Commitment." It is free to all registrants.

The purpose of the seminar series is "to expand the capacities of people who want to lead locally," says Wolf. "Those who come can be people already in leadership positions or not." The training is part of the mission of the college's Leadership Center.

"The workshop will be very interactive," explains Wolf. "People will be encouraged to express their personal vision for the town. We will also shed some light and awareness on the barriers that are holding people and organizations back; step back and look at what is happening in the system; where are the road blocks and how we can move forward in a more collaborative, more effective way." The two following Thursdays encompass "Cultivating a Vision with your Organization and Connecting the Dots with Possible Partners," and "Working with Conflicts and Hot Topics in New and Creative Ways."

"This is critical for Moraga," says Keimach. "What we want is to train current and future town leadership to be able to resolve conflicts at a highly functional level and get better answers." Keimach has invited all of her department heads to participate in the series, as well as members of the town's commissions, committees and foundations. But Keimach wants to also reach residents who may not currently be involved but are interested in learning to communicate their vision so others can hear it.

The town manager is grateful for the college's generosity in organizing this workshop for free. "The Leadership Center has been wonderful taking the lead on this," she says. "They do this kind of training professionally and we are anticipating a very high quality experience."

Wolf explains that the sessions will be beneficial to people in their everyday lives as well. "The nature of leadership is changing," she says. "We need to have both a long term vision and the adaptability to be able to respond to changes as they rapidly emerge." She believes that the world is calling for new, more collaborative, less hierarchical ways and people need to be trained in order to adapt. "Nowadays it might be much more effective to have a one-year experiment and be responding to what is occurring in the moment as opposed to continuing to wonder what's going to happen," she adds.

If you're interested, you may attend one, two, or all three evenings. To register for the free workshops send an email to Wolf at maurawolf@aol.com. The meetings will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Serbian Church meeting room, 1700 School Street, Moraga. For information about the Saint Mary's College Leadership Center, visit <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/leadership-center/about-the-center>.

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