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Orinda City Clerk Michele Olsen Reflects on Her Decade of Service to the Community

By Laurie Snyder



Photo Ohlen Alexander

Time flies when you're a city official - especially when you advocate for engaging citizens in government like Michele Olsen. The Orinda city clerk since 2006, Olsen began working for the city 10 years ago. Her department, as defined by the Association of City Clerks of California, is one "within the municipal government upon which the city council, all City departments, and the general public rely for information regarding the operations and legislative history of the City."

Charged by state law with overseeing local elections, legislation, and Public Records, Political Reform, and Brown Act matters, Olsen also administers the Oath of Office to newly elected council members, and helps Orinda ensure "compliance with all federal, state and local statutes and regulations and that all actions are properly executed, recorded, and archived." Responsible for maintaining the Municipal Code and Conflict of Interest program, she is also the custodian of the city seal, and acts as the local filing officer for officials submitting Fair Political Practices Commission-required financial disclosures.

But Olsen, whose job requires her to be in tune with changing laws, government codes and technology, is also "old school" in one very interesting way. When she votes, she still does it at her designated polling place in Orinda so that she can feel connected to the process - and with her own kids right there watching and learning. "They're

comfortable within government and the community," she says. "They know what it means to be an Orindan."

Of her many duties, it is Olsen's administration of the city's recruitment of citizens to serve on Orinda's commissions and the responsibilities she holds for "conducting elections in an impartial manner and acting as a link for the transparent exchange of information between residents and their local government" that give her the greatest professional satisfaction.

With an average of three vacancies each on planning, parks, finance and other citizen bodies for 2014, she hopes that more residents will apply than ever before. "City commissions are critical because important issues are evaluated there before they reach the city council. Council members want to know the issues have been evaluated before they weigh in."

To those with time constraints, she says, "At least stay informed. We have two independent papers - the Lamorinda Weekly and the Orinda News - that focus on us and on what's going on, and on providing outlets for people to speak."

For those who do have time to give back, she says, it can be very rewarding. "Volunteers run this community. Volunteers run the city. Your council members are volunteers; your commissioners are volunteers. That's what makes Orinda so special."

Applications for the volunteer bodies are due by Jan. 3, 2014. To learn more about how you can become involved, visit the city's website, or contact Olsen at: (925) 253-4221; molsen@cityoforinda.org.

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