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Dale Walwark, Rooted Moraga Citizen

By Sophie Braccini



Dale Walwark Photo Sophie Braccini

Dale Walwark was not always Moraga's beloved elder statesman; he was a corporate communications professional working for large organizations. Now in his 70s, Walwark believes that the later part of his life has been at least as fulfilling as his professional life, if not more so. He's done it all in Moraga, from lending a hand at the garden club to serving on the town council, and he still regularly aims pointed questions at current council members during meetings. A passionate lover of the English language, a well-rounded traveler and reader, Walwark, and his wife Penny, are quintessential Moragans - enjoying life and giving back to their community.

"Being paid nothing for improving the community has turned out to be more rewarding than some of the jobs for which I was paid during my working life," says Walwark, who comes from a

family with a history of volunteer service. His father was the president of a service club, and later the chamber of commerce, in the Illinois town where he grew up. His mother headed a Parent-Teacher Association and was a Cub Scout den mother. His parents were what he calls "mid-western, salt-of-the-earth people," simple and hard working. But a young Walwark wanted to explore the world beyond Illinois and shortly after graduating in the early 1960s, from the University of Illinois, he bought a Volkswagen, took delivery in London, and traveled through Europe.

He discovered California shortly after his return to the United States. He quit his job and headed west on Route 66. "We didn't know it at the time, but we were living in a golden era. We just thought it was the American way," he recalls. "Almost immediately, I found a job with an advertising agency and soon after met my wife, Penny."

The couple moved to Moraga with their two children in 1976 and quickly became involved in the community.

Walwark suggests that even those without a history of volunteerism try joining a service group, such as Kiwanis, Rotary or Lions; he says the experience will open a new door. "If people take an active role, their lives and the communities they serve are enhanced."

"In my own case, I began by volunteering for the Moraga Parks and Recreation Commission." A few years later, he chaired the commission. "A fellow member introduced me to her husband, and he introduced me to the Kiwanis Club," which he later headed as president. And that led to a successful run for the town council, where his service included representing Moraga on the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority, a body he chaired for a year. He also served on the board of the Moraga Park Foundation.

Walwark does not like to boast about his achievements - as far as he's concerned, teamwork is everything. As a council member from 2000 to 2004, he is proud to have been part of the team that approved the skate park. "I was the swing vote on the council for that decision," he remembers. "The anti-park didn't like me, and the pro-park didn't like me either because I demanded that things be done right, which took more time." Another achievement of that town council was to reduce the build-out forecasted in the 2002 revision of the General Plan by one-third.

"Moraga needs volunteer work because it has a small staff and a small budget," he says. "I'm sure many citizens think that the town government does everything, but that isn't true."

Walwark hopes the new generation will be interested in supporting the town and he is adamant that this does not mean everyone must shoulder huge responsibilities. "I have dug for the Garden Club, planted daffodils for Kiwanis, grilled burgers for the Park Foundation, knocked on doors for the street tax, and taken abuse as an elected official, but most people prefer to enter volunteerism through a single door with no stairs to climb," he says. "That's OK. Get the books rearranged in the proper order on the library shelves, work at the Oktoberfest, whatever. There are many needs, large and small. If you want to do more, opportunities await."

And, according to Walwark, there is an added bonus - you'll meet great people. "My friends in Moraga are, by and large, those I have worked with," he says. "I admire so many friends who just keep giving year after year, with no particular recognition and certainly no compensation, simply because they recognize needs and find it rewarding to fill them."

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