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## Town Manager Moves On

By Sophie Braccini



Jill Keimach Photo Andy Scheck

"You can't hold a good person back," said Moraga mayor Mike Metcalf when expressing his regrets that Town Manager Jill Keimach was leaving her position. Keimach was offered the job of city manager for the city of Alameda.

"Jill had a real knack and a unique talent to respond respectfully to the public concerns while revealing all of the facts related to any issue," said Roger Wykle, who worked with Keimach when he was mayor in 2015. "In my view, she offered sound advice to the council on a litany of issues and was always on point. She will indeed be missed and we wish her well in her new endeavors with the city of Alameda." Keimach says her last day in the Moraga office will be Jan. 28. The council chose Chief of Police Bob Priebe to serve as interim town manager; he will start on Feb. 1.

Keimach says she was ready for a new challenge, but speaking from the heart, she expresses her sadness at leaving behind the many friends she has made in the community and within her staff, as well as a job that made every day a pleasure.

It was just last November that a surprise celebration was organized by the community to honor the fifth anniversary of the Moraga town manager. According to the International City/County Management Association the average tenure of managers has been growing over the years and was averaging 6.9 years in 2000. "When I took the position, I thought that I would stay for two or three years," says Keimach. "I didn't think that there would be so many topics of interest." But Moraga's calm and bucolic feel was deceiving, and Keimach quickly understood that there were many stimulating issues to tackle.

The first one was the dog park dispute that ignited heated community debate; then the matter of the newly paved Moraga Road that started to peal. "I realized that this was going to be very interesting," she says. Coming from Fremont, where on the best nights two people from the community attended the council meetings, Keimach was impressed by the level of community engagement. She noticed a remarkably high number of community volunteers. She remembers when she was asked to draft a timeline for the Measure K campaign, "I did it and thought, there is so much to do! How will I be able to do this along with everything else? But when I presented it to the volunteer committee, they took charge of everything. I had never seen such a thing, they actually did the work."

Among her achievements of the past five years, Keimach is quite proud of the town chamber that was built at 335 Rheem. "We kept the cost below \$1 million, when in most communities such high-tech meeting places come to many millions," says Keimach. On the administrative side, she said that budget, contracts and oversight processes have improved every year. "I feel very good about all the foundation stuff that was done in cooperation with the department heads," she says. She

hired them all, except for the chief of police, parks and recreation director, and town clerk.

When Keimach came on board, she had questions about the staff. "When I visited the office before I was hired it was so silent, everyone had their door closed and I was concerned I would be lonely," says Keimach. Her actual experience was completely different. "There is something special in the way people work here and the culture of openness among staff," she says. "This is very unique to this town." At the time of the economic downturn, it was impossible to give staff raises, so Keimach found a way to reward her staff that did not cost a penny to the community: she gave them every other Friday off.

"It's impossible to adequately describe what working with her has meant to me," says Priebe. "She's brilliant, a consummate professional, engenders trust with everyone and goes about her job and life with a great positive approach and sense of humor. I am blessed to have her as a mentor and be able to learn so much about so many things from her."

There are some big issues that Keimach did not supervise to completion that her successor will need to address, such as the Hacienda de las Flores plan. The architects were supposed to submit a proposal last October, but the options on the table were too grandiose for the town. "They will come back with a smaller scale project that would be implemented in phases," says Keimach, who believes that it is also important to include public use for the Hacienda. The other big unresolved issue is the delayed maintenance of many assets, including the drainage system. Keimach is also concerned about traffic.

"In general the town is in good hands," she says. "There is a good public debate going on regarding how much and what kind of development. Hopefully it will continue as a civil debate." She knows that every community in the Bay Area is struggling with this issue, which is the result of a good economy that creates jobs and the need for more housing.

A goal setting session for the town is scheduled on Jan. 21. The search for a new town manager has begun, but it can take several months to find a qualified candidate.

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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