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A Place for Flags Beyond Repair

By Cathy Dausman



Boy Scouts stand by Victor Petersen's project.

Old Glory spends a lot of time outdoors. Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day, Patriot Day, Election Day and state and federal holidays are all occasions to fly the red, white and blue. But exposure to the elements eventually takes its toll, and flag etiquette forbids simply throwing away even a damaged U.S. flag.

Flags are instead ceremonially retired with honor, by an organization like scout troops, Veterans of Foreign Wars or American Legion posts (see www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0618/Goodbye-Old-Glory-Scouts-Retire-Two-US-Flags.html).

The challenge can be get-

ting the tattered flag into the right hands. Now, thanks to Boy Scout Victor Petersen of Pleasant Hill's Troop 405, it's easy.

Unserviceable U.S. flags may be deposited in a box at the entrance to the Lafayette Veteran's Memorial Center. Work on the box, which was Petersen's Eagle Scout project, began last summer under the direction of VFW Post 8063 member and scout leader Bill Lew. The finished product was installed in March.

Victor said placing the collection box at the center seemed especially appropriate because the VFW is the chartering organization for several local Boy Scout troops. He initially considered refurbish-

ing an old mailbox but found those were scarce. Instead he used a standard courier box from a hardware store and had a local auto body shop custom paint it red, white and blue. Donations for the purchase of the box and its paint job came from Victor's grandfather.

Lew said a few finishing touches – specifically the installation of American Legion and VFW logos on the box— remain. He is unsure just how many flags have been collected to date. "I know flags have gone into the box, but I couldn't give you a count," he said. He will tell you the finished product is beautiful.

Mt. Diablo Silverado Council BSA District Director Joe Squeri said Brentwood Veteran's Memorial Hall also has a flag collection box.

Local Cub Scouts incorporated a flag retirement ceremony during Family Camp over Memorial weekend, he said, adding, "We have a volunteer who is beginning a program to get flags that need retiring to Boy Scout troops that can retire them."

Orinda Loses Its Heart

Orinda

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Olsen's mother will be moving to Charlotte with her, and Olsen's sister already lives in Boston, so she will be much closer too.

Olsen said that the biggest changes she has observed in her years as city clerk is the advent of more transparency. She has worked hard to get information about the city out to the public, which, she observed, was not easy as a one-person shop working with older technology. Olsen is very excited about the improvements in technology finally coming to Orinda in the next few years. She spoke of Orinda's proposed new website (see story, page A7) with live streaming improvements.

She is proud, too, of improvements in elections — which was her favorite part of the job. She has worked at polling places, and given civics lessons on elections to elementary schools. As a neutral party, Olsen has taken pride in helping candidates go through the election process. She laughed as she commented, "They call me Switzerland because I'm a neutral party!" So dedicated is she to her job that she will do everything that she can to prepare for the November election prior to leaving for North Carolina.

The least favorite part of her job has been when people have written letters questioning the city's integrity. What won't she miss? The long, late meetings.

But she will miss the people,

hands down her favorite aspect of her job. Olsen acknowledges that she is an extrovert. "They call me the heart of the city," she noted, and the mayor concurred, noting that Olsen is often the first, and sometimes the only, contact with city government for citizens. When asked what it would surprise people to know about her, she responded, "That it wasn't just a job for me, I truly embodied this role."

What is on Olsen's bucket list? She wants to compete in an Olympic distance triathlon, take up yoga, travel more and play golf. Her parting words to the citizens of Orinda are, "Thank you for being so involved and making Orinda the amazing place it is. Stay engaged and work together to find solutions to issues that still face Orinda."

Olsen will be replaced on an interim basis by Sherry Kelly, a former city clerk of Berkeley, who has served as interim city clerk in the nearby cities of Walnut Creek, Vallejo and American Canyon. Although Olsen, as the longest serving director-member of the executive team in Orinda, is an invaluable fount of institutional knowledge, she is confident that Kelly, as a retired city clerk with years of experience, will be a really good person for the transition and training the next city clerk.

The city will bid Olsen farewell June 1, from 5 to 7 p.m. in the Orinda Community Center.

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