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Orinda marks passing of former mayor with moment of silence

By Sora O'Doherty



Former Orinda Mayor Gregg Wheatland Photo provided

Former Orinda Mayor Gregg Wheatland died Sunday, Dec. 17, after a brief illness. His passing was marked by the City Council with a moment of silence in his honor at the conclusion of its Dec. 19 meeting.

Wheatland served on the city council for three full terms, serving as mayor twice between 1992 and 2004. Wheatland was an attorney, a partner at Ellison, Schneider and Harris LLP.

According to Laura Abrams, who served on the city council with Wheatland for 10 years, he died after a brief illness and his wife, Shirley, an Orinda native, and his daughter Tara, an attorney in Alaska, were at his side. The Wheatlands met when both were attending UC Santa Cruz. Wheatland later earned his law degree at UC Davis. In addition to his career as an attorney, Wheatland served as a public utility judge.

Abrams described Wheatland as a very private person, but a brilliant person. "I served on a pretty smart council, high IQs," Abrams said, "but Gregg stood out.

"He had amazing ability as a legislator," Abrams said. "He was an enormous resource, a fierce environmentalist, a real superhero." Abrams considered Wheatland not just a colleague but a friend and praised him as very kind and generous, a person who would step up and offer his tremendous skills to help you. He always had an answer, Abrams added, as well as unimpeachable

integrity. "He was one of a kind," she concluded.

Wheatland and Joyce Hawkins negotiated the compromise that built Gateway Valley (now Wilder) and obtained \$10 million that the city received years before groundbreaking and used to build the gymnasium at Wagner Ranch Elementary School, remodel the community center and build the city offices and the library. Mayor Amy Worth used the moment of silence to remember Wheatland for the gifts he gave to the Orinda community, which will continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

Former Orinda City Manager Bill Lindsay remembered that he really enjoyed working with Wheatland, who cared so much about the Orinda community. "He was very creative at looking at issues and coming up with solutions to problems, and I learned a lot from him," Lindsay said, adding that he was part of a wonderful team of council members during Lindsay's tenure.

In a resolution that marked the conclusion of his time on the city council, Wheatland was credited with turning around public opinion on Wilder and establishing a paramedic program for the community. He was also cited for improving the city's solid waste programs, and Contra Costa County's transit systems through his leadership on joint powers agencies.

The resolution stated that Wheatland had a particular passion for customer service, and helped initiate programs in the city's organization that would more effectively reach out to the community and that his positive impact on quality of life in Orinda and in Contra Costa County would be a legacy well beyond his 12 years on the council.

The family plans to hold a memorial on the afternoon of Jan. 13 at the Orinda Community Center.

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