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Chamber honors Moraga Business of the Year and Nonprofit of the Year

By Vera Kochan



Moraga Citizens Network board members standing, from left: Tory Courtney, Larry Beans and Diana Obrand. Ellen Beans seated. Photos Vera Kochan

Lamorinda area, she was disappointed in the lack of compassion that real estate agents showed to potential home buyers. Olsen decided to take real estate classes and one thing led to another. Besides helping clients find their perfect home, she has bought and sold her own houses here several times, saying, "Lamorinda is where our heart is."

Sue Olsen's son, Ben, was born in Lafayette, raised in Orinda and now lives with his family in Moraga, but he didn't follow in his mother's footsteps right away. An early career in computer technology allowed his skills to help Sue's growing real estate firm become competitive. His tech job forced him to travel a lot, and he "noticed a lack of warmth toward clients in the tech industry." Appreciating the personal touch his mother provided to her clients, Ben began to work for Sue as an administrative assistant. He eventually earned his Realtor license, and under Sue's mentoring went on to sales. "By then I had a family and had a connection with others in the community who were looking for a family home," he said. "I had a common ground as to their needs."

When asked about the award Sue replied, "I was flabbergasted! It's the first time they did a Business of the Year, so it's a great honor!"

Ben added, "It's nice to have the whole team honored. It will have a special place in our hearts, because we all live in Moraga." The Olsen Team has eight employees. Their website is www.theolsenteam.com.

The Nonprofit of the Year recipient is Moraga Citizens Network (MCN), founded in 2005 by a group of 25 townspeople who felt it was important to keep its citizens informed and abreast of town council decisions and other pertinent town information.

Ellen Beans, MCN's executive director, states, "Though Moraga Citizens Network is not a 'business' in the usual sense of the word, we do have a business that focuses on communication to instill the desire in Moraga residents to participate in issues and events that are relevant to Moraga." The MCN Link, manned by Beans, has provided e-bulletin news to the town since 2008, when she took over the newsletter duties from Edy Schwartz. MCN can now claim 1,781 subscribers to their email list.

Though the numbers have dwindled from the original 25, the small army that constitutes the current MCN board is just as mighty. Diana Obrand, current president, helps Beans run board meetings, create the agenda and organize events such as last council member election's Candidates Night, a booth at the Pear and Wine Festival and the upcoming Staff Appreciation Luncheon on Feb. 20 at the Hacienda de las Flores to honor the town staff.

Other board members include Tory Courtney, past president and event volunteer; Larry Beans, treasurer; Leslie Engler, webmaster; Ben Olsen; George Barron and Sharon Flower, secretary.

Beans said the Nonprofit of the Year award, "came as a complete surprise! I was thrilled! It's a great honor

In a departure from past procedures of naming a Business Person of the Year, the Moraga Chamber of Commerce decided to change things up by honoring a Business of the Year. And, since three of the nominations were nonprofits, a separate category, Nonprofit of the Year, was added.

The 2018 business winner is The Olsen Team - the 13th recipient of the Business award - headed by Sue Olsen and Ben Olsen, and the nonprofit winner is Moraga Citizens Network.

The nominations were gathered for five weeks and voted on by the executive committee of the Chamber board. All of the nominees had to meet six important criteria: be a Chamber member in good standing; demonstrate ethical business practices; have good customer relationships; practice good business strategies; serve as a good business role model and support the Moraga community.

The Olsen Team's founder, Sue Olsen, initially had a career as a triage nurse in the Midwest. In the late 1970s, while looking to purchase a home in the

to be recognized this way." The board is hoping that this honor will give them more recognition within the community and gain new subscribers. Beans added, "Our donors allow us to pay for the constant contact and services that we sponsor." To subscribe and/or donate visit the MCN website at www.moraga

citizensnetwork.org.

To purchase tickets for the awards celebration, held at the Moraga Country Club on Tuesday, Feb. 19 (confirmed attendees are Supervisor Candace Andersen, Assemblywoman Rebecca Bauer-Kahn and Moraga Mayor Roger Wykle) with a reception starting at 6 p.m., dinner and presentation ceremony to follow, visit www.moragachamber.org or call Kathe Nelson @ (925) 323-6524. Seating is limited.



The Olsen Team's Ben Olsen and Sue Olsen

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