

Published August 21st, 2019

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director - Moraga's ambassador

By Vera Kochan



Kathe Nelson hard at work for Moraga's businesses. Photo Vera Kochan

Working out of the Chamber of Commerce's tiny office, located in the Rheem Shopping Center, Executive Director Kathe Nelson makes big things happen for Moraga.

Nelson began her chamber career in 2009, when Edy Schwartz was president of the fledgling Moraga Chamber. Schwartz needed someone to work 10 hours a week helping with administrative duties. Nelson joked, "My husband (Walter) said I was available."

Nelson's previous experience was working for consumer sales companies. "I've always worked in front of people, because I was in sales. Now I work behind the scenes, and I like that better." Through time, her job responsibilities increased and by 2013 she earned the title of executive director.

Before moving to Clayton three years ago, Nelson and her family had been Moraga residents since 1974.

"The biggest misconception is that the chamber works for the town," Nelson explained. "We are supported by annual dues, profits from the annual Golf Tournament and the Community Faire. Our dollars are really stretched and we operate on a shoestring budget."

Nelson feels that the chamber has made progress for the town through the years. "The influence of the chamber has expanded since I've started through the evolution of different boards. We've created a common entity where information could be exchanged and businesses could support each other." She added, "We've become much more involved with the core of the town working with the planning commission and the town manager to attract businesses."

She also states that the chamber has worked hard to increase the town/gown relationship with Saint Mary's College. Every fall semester Nelson gives the chamber a strong presence during orientation events by letting the students know what's available to them within the town.

One event that Nelson is co-creator of, along with past chamber president Frank Melon, is the annual Golf Tournament held at the Moraga Country Club and heading into its eighth year. That and the annual Community Faire are her favorite events to coordinate. She also enjoys planning the Business and Business Person of the Year celebrations, because "it gives the community a chance to get involved in nominations and it's a nice evening of honor."

Nelson also attends Lamorinda chamber meetings where ideas are bounced around to include any possible tri-city events. She continually stays in contact with members of Chambers of Commerce of Contra Costa County (5C) to expand on possibilities that could be of interest to Moraga. She is either serving or has served on at least 19 Moraga related committees.

When asked if she has a wish list, Nelson responded, "That Moragans would understand the importance of supporting local businesses and to contribute to the town's growth."

Two newly created ventures designed to promote town business and sponsored by the chamber are the Jeanette Fritzky Case Study Foundation and the Small Business Catalyst Program. Both events, involving SMC business majors, were a huge success this past year. The More Moraga Grant Program will most likely see a revival as well.

Moraga Chamber of Commerce President Bob Fritzky gives Nelson high praise for her efforts: "Kathe understood being a part of the Moraga Chamber had challenges versus other East Bay communities that may have a more robust business sector, but Kathe was determined to create high visibility for the chamber members."

Fritzky also stated, "When the Chamber lost financial support from the town due to the challenges of the sinkhole and Canyon Bridge, Kathe Nelson requested a voluntary pay cut to continue what Kathe loves. The chamber members continue to grow under Kathe's leadership (now up to 184 members)."

Moraga Shopping Center's property owner Dave Bruzzone said, "Kathe has been a tireless worker in advocating for our business community. She is thoughtful and articulate in promoting the many diversified perspectives you'd find in our membership, while also voicing the common theme of the chamber's importance in making us a better community."

Nelson said that she often gets emails or phone calls involving strange requests, but a recent one was very touching. A Moraga mom, whose Marine Corp son was home on leave and was scheduled to deploy that day (a Sunday), called the chamber office for help. His uniform was still at the Rheem Valley Cleaners, which was closed on Sundays. The cleaners had just changed owners and Nelson did not yet have the new owner's information. She called the previous owner who in turn called the new owner who drove to Moraga and opened the shop for the marine to pick up his uniform.

"I love to help people. It's rewarding," replied Nelson. "It's about community, and promoting, and doing anything I can do to get people to stay here and contribute."

For more information on the Moraga Chamber of Commerce visit: www.moragachamber.org. To email Kathe Nelson: kathe@moragachamber.org. Or phone (925) 323-6524.

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA