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Kimberleigh Korpus: Her journey to becoming mayor of Moraga

By Vera Kochan



From left, new Vice Mayor Mike McCluer and new Moraga Mayor Kimberleigh Korpus at the dais. Photo Vera Kochan

As Moraga's new mayor, Kimberleigh Korpus takes the reigns of a reorganized town council while looking back on her road to the end result. In 2011, when she and her family moved back into the town where she grew up, Korpus never imagined that one day she would become its mayor. "I vaguely intended to try to 'get involved' in town government at some point in the future, but the intention wasn't clearly enough formulated in my mind to even consider the possibility that holding an elected position here in town was a potential reality - much less being the mayor."

Korpus' first foray into government involvement was to join the Planning Commission in March 2016, after a neighbor's complaint over a Rainbow play structure she was installing for her kids the prior year. Upon her appointment, she voraciously studied the Moraga Municipal Code and Moraga Design Guidelines. When a controversial project (Moraga Town Center Homes) came up for review Korpus' research showed that a particular

analysis/standard did not appear in the MMC. Through her efforts, the Planning Commission ended up denying the application in a 3-3 vote stalemate. Despite her attempts to take the matter public through open letters to the town council and social media in the summer of 2016, the town council approved the MTCH project.

Korpus' work did not go unnoticed by residents who were frustrated about planning issues. When one resident asked her to run for town council she laughed at the idea. Soon others approached her to run. "What really got me to take the idea seriously, though, was when one resident told me how valuable he thought my approach to making decisions was," Korpus recalled. "And that my ability to articulate and stand up for what I believe (rather than just acquiescing to the status quo) was exactly what the town council desperately needed."

When asked how it felt to be mayor of a town she grew up in, Korpus replied, "It's a bit surreal, actually . and a bit like playing dress-up sometimes. I'm still that same young girl inside in many ways, and that young girl peeks out from time to time and lets me know she is a bit in awe of the fact that she now gets to stand up in public and bear the impressive title of mayor of the town she grew up in."

Recalling her halcyon days of youth spent hanging out with friends at the Rheem Valley Bowl or Fudge Alley, bike rides along Moraga's trails with her mom, cardboard sliding down hills during summers and playing volleyball for Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School or Campolindo High School, Korpus acknowledged, "But when I feel the awe, I only feel it in spurts - because the reality of the situation is that it's a lot of work!"

Korpus said her family is proud of her work on the town council. "In particular, my three boys are very enamored with the title 'mayor' because they've been hoping for three years for the opportunity to brag that their mother is the mayor," she laughed. "They even nagged me for weeks after I was elected mayor about the fact that the town website hadn't been updated to list me as the mayor yet, because their friends wouldn't believe them that their mom was actually the mayor of Moraga."

With the hope that the council members can continue to work together to set Moraga back on track, Korpus sites some of the issues that still need attention (pavement, storm drains, capital asset replacement and pension liability). As the town begins the new Canyon Bridge project and completes others already underway, Korpus said, "It became clear last year that the town is quickly approaching a crossroads. In the near future, the town will need to decide who it wants to be." Citing three potential scenarios to Moraga's fiscal recovery as either to proceed with cash flow issues due to failing infrastructure; make painful cuts in services; or raise taxes to avoid the first two scenarios.

By acknowledging the many challenges that Moraga faced in 2019, Korpus is inspired by the possibilities on the horizon for 2020. She hopes to make the coming year one of reflection and reprioritization while taking pride in the many accomplishments achieved.

"For the last few years, Moraga has been caught in a nonstop disaster, recovery and aversion mode that has finally started to taper off in the last six months," Korpus stated. "In addition, during the past year we've been focused on a deep exploration and analysis of town operations, finances and unfunded needs.

"So, with all of the work that we've been doing over the last few years," she stated, "we seem to be primed this next year to take some extra time to reflect and reprioritize as we make decisions and plans that we hope will set the town up for years to come - to deliver quality services and meet the community's needs."

Stressing the importance of serving the community, Korpus encourages citizens to serve on the various commissions and committees that currently have openings. She also reminds residents of the three seats on the town council coming up for election in November. She is more than happy to answer any questions from potential candidates. "I want to encourage people with passion and vision for this town to step forward and offer to use their brains and skills in service to the town at this crucial time - because Moraga needs them."

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