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Orinda City Council ends meeting by honoring Steve Gentry

By Sora O'Doherty



Steve Gentry checks a beehive frame. Photo LW archive

The mayor and members of the city council took time at the conclusion of their meeting on Feb. 4 to honor Steve Gentry, who died on Jan. 20. Mayor Darlene Gee began by saying that Orinda lost a very dear resident recently. She went on to describe Gentry as a fourth-generation Orindan who was very active in the community. Gee wanted Gentry's family to know that Orinda was thinking of them.

Most recently, Gee continued, Gentry was the president of the Friends of Wagner Ranch Nature Area; he raised over \$36,000 for the preservation of that area. "Most of all," she said, "Steve was a rather famous beekeeper." She recounted how he went to Humboldt State and became a marine biologist, often did painting and contracting on the side while he was practicing to be a marine biologist and soon, she said, he found it was more profitable to be a remodeling contractor. Gentry took a local beekeeping course in 1979 and soon after he

helped found the Mt. Diablo Beekeepers Association, writing the charter in 1982, and he served for many years in that association. He was a board member of Contra Costa certified farmers' markets and he sold his honey at farmers' markets, Diablo Foods, Whole Foods, and many of the restaurants in the area. "We are very, very sad," Gee said. "Steve was often featured on the Food Network and many, many times he was in newspapers and magazines so we are going to miss him very, very much and we would like to close this meeting in his honor."

Vice Mayor Amy Worth said Gentry was an incredible man and a real environmentalist. Worth spoke of how Gentry had worked very closely with Toris Jaeger over the decades to nurture and insure that the nature area was an incredible resource for our students. One of his big loves, Worth said, was bringing nature home. She recalled personally how she "loved going to the hardware store and seeing his honey. What a treasure he was. Just a wonderful, wonderful man."

Mike Vigo, the current president of the Mt. Diablo Beekeepers, in an interview, said he had first met Steve at a Mt. Diablo Beekeepers meeting around 2006. "We had started beekeeping because our daughters were in 4H; we had a hive at our house. We had questions, so we reached out to Steve. He was very gracious; he came over and spent at least an hour with us at the house. Such a nice guy, so wonderful with bees." Vigo praised Gentry's generosity and openness. Vigo said he absorbed everything he could from Gentry, whom he described as "pretty much a walking encyclopedia about bees."

Andy Scheck, the publisher of Lamorinda Weekly, who is also a beekeeper, recounted how Gentry was like a bee whisperer. When others would be fully suited up in protective gear, Gentry would be casually wearing a Hawaiian shirt. The bees would walk all over him, in and out of his shirt, but never sting him, Scheck said. "Where others could keep a hive open for maybe 10 minutes before the bees would become disturbed," Scheck said, "Steve could have a hive open for 45 minutes while he explained its workings, and the bees tolerated him happily."

It won't just be people who miss Gentry.

(See Gentry's obituary on page B6.)

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