

Published March 4th, 2020

Rick and Janet Cronk, Lafayette Citizens of the Year

By Pippa Fisher



Janet and Rick Cronk, this year's Citizens of the Year. Photo Pippa Fisher

Whether the names of this year's husband/wife-team Citizens of the Year are familiar or not, it's fair to say almost everyone living in Lafayette or the wider East Bay, has benefited from the philanthropy of Rick and Janet Cronk. And while their financial generosity has contributed substantially to a state-of-the-art library and first-rate schools in Lafayette, a world-class hospital in Walnut Creek and a top-notch university in Berkeley, to name but a few from which many local residents benefit, the bigger picture of these two remarkable people is their ability to inspire and lead.

That ability to lead and inspire is particularly evident in Rick's lifelong involvement with scouting, locally, nationally and internationally. As a boy he achieved Life Scout. As an adult he volunteered as a leader in Moraga Troop 212 for his own three sons and even after they achieved Eagle and moved on. He serves on the Boy Scouts of America National Executive board and served a term as president (2006-08). In 2011, he

finished his chairmanship of the World Scout Committee, the executive body responsible for 50 million Scouts in 190 countries. He is also past chairman of the World Scout Foundation (2005-07) and continues serving on the WSF Board.

Rick and Janet sit on many boards. Rick has been a member of the Haas Business School Advisory Board, serving two terms as chairman and has just resigned as a member of the John Muir Health Board of Directors after his 10-year term.

Both Rick and Janet have been longtime supporters of Lafayette Partners in Education, the Lafayette Library and Learning Center and St. Perpetua Church. Rick has been involved with youth ministries through the church, and for many years, despite a hectic travel schedule for work, managed to coach soccer, including teams after his own children had moved on. He has been a big supporter of water sports, especially at Cal, and is largely responsible for the building of Legends Aquatic Center.

Janet has been involved in Lafayette schools since moving here in 1983. She is a committed supporter of education. She is very involved with Cal, John Muir Health and Diablo Regional Arts Association. She has held many leadership roles over the years with the Happy Valley Garden Club, including president.

The list goes on, but it is through talking to others that one gets a sense of the unwavering support these people offer the community, their ability to inspire others to be better, and in particular their passion for educating and empowering young people.

Lafayette Resident Jill Douglas has worked as Janet's personal assistant for 15 years. "Their enthusiasm for life and learning transcends every aspect of all they do," says Douglas. "Their charisma inspires people."

Former Mayor Anne Godin recalls one of the many fundraisers held at the Cronk home for the Cal band. "The excitement in the air was palpable to hear and see the Cal band marching down Happy Valley Road to go to Rick and Janet's home to rev up the alumni for a fundraiser," she says. "Nothing could be more exciting - unless you went to Stanford."

Grodin says that when she first approached the Cronks on behalf of the Lafayette Community Foundation for a gift to the new library she thought they would be inclined to donate in light of their past support of local causes. "But their excitement when they saw the architectural model was so enthusiastic that they immediately donated \$1 million. Not only did they write a large check," says Grodin, "but they also got involved in helping to raise funds for the new library." She explains they hosted events at their home, made calls to solicit gifts and took others on tours of the construction site. "Their support was invaluable in the building of the LLLC," says Grodin.

St. Perpetua Church's Rev. John Kasper agrees. "Their encouraging and 'can-do' spirit helps to turn wishes and dreams into reality," he says. "Their support and encouragement have helped our parish and school community to grow as we've built a new Community Center and made major improvements to our facilities. Rick's smile lights up a room and you can't help but feel affirmed and energized in his presence."

The couple are completely humble, embarrassed even, by this Citizen of the Year award. Rick shrugs and says, "We just raised our hands."

Both are Bay Area natives. Both are Cal graduates, who met as students working at the Lair of the Bear, the Cal alumni family camp and married soon after. They have three sons and five grandchildren, all living locally. In 1977, following a few years in the restaurant business, Rick Cronk bought Bay Area ice cream company Dreyer's with his partner and friend, Gary Rogers. Together they expanded Dreyer's to become the number one ice cream company in the country.

The Dreyer's philosophy - their positive work culture - revolves around respect and one of its guiding tenets is empowerment, which Rick brings to all his ventures, a value he says he got from his mother. "She worked really hard and expected a lot," says Rick, adding, "It is all about empowering people to do more, achieve more."

Former Mayor and last year's Citizen of the Year Don Tatzin says that for all their accomplishments, Rick and Janet remain modest. "They are unassuming, unfailingly considerate and delightful company," he says. "At every meeting I have with them, I feel good about them and they make me and others feel good about ourselves. That is a rare and valuable trait."

Janet says the award means a lot to them because, "This is our community. We love Lafayette."
The couple will be honored at a sold-out dinner March 13 at the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa.

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