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Orinda honors volunteers and PG&E friend

By Sora O'Doherty



Tom Guarino, who recently passed away, works with residents at the Lost Valley substation, November 2016. Photo Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda city council took the opportunity on Jan. 12 to honor some people who have contributed to the quality of life in the city.

"Mark Roberts has served this community for so many years in so many capacities," Mayor Amy Worth said by way of introduction. While the council was specifically honoring Roberts for his service on the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee, Worth praised him for all of his volunteer efforts. Worth recalled that former mayor Victoria Smith recommended setting up a citizen committee to respond to neighbors' safety concerns.

"Mark has been instrumental, has been like a rock on that committee," Worth said. But he has worn many hats in Orinda. Roberts was presented with a certificate honoring his many years of dedicated service on TSAC. "Volunteers like you make Orinda such a wonderful place to live," Worth concluded.

Vice Mayor Dennis Fay added his thanks, and Council Member Darlene Gee told Roberts, "You are really, really the living embodiment of what Orinda is like with volunteers;" adding that she could hardly think of anything that his name has not been associated with over the years.

Council Member Inga Miller told Roberts, "You are such a warm spirit; you are always surrounded by your friends," and hoped that the city would continue to see him at the annual Fourth of July parade.

Jane Wisner accepted honors for the Orinda Garden Club for its holiday wreath program. The mayor told Wisner, who accepted a proclamation for the hand-decorated wreaths, that she was particularly grateful for the beautiful wreaths that adorned the community during the holiday season.

"During COVID-19," she wondered, "how do we make it feel like there is some sense of joy?"

Worth said that the wreaths helped people feel a sense of place, and hoped that they encouraged people to shop locally.

Wisner said that this was the ninth year of the program, which was started because the garden club wanted to do something for the community. "The image of the wreath represents friendship," she said, "the circle of life." She thanked the director of Parks and Recreation for giving the garden club a safe place to assemble the wreaths, on tables set up outside of the community center. Wisner also gave a shout out to the clubs plant sale, which will take place April 17 at the community center. Club members are busy propagating plants from their gardens now. She concluded her remarks by telling the council that the recognition "means the world to us, and your appreciation means so much to us."

Council Member Nick Kosla said that his children are 11 and 14 and have grown up with the tradition of the wreaths around Orinda. "This year, so many traditions didn't happen because of COVID," he said, "but this was a lovely tradition."

Agreeing that the wreaths were incredibly special, Council Member Darlene Gee said, "They are always nice, but this year it gave everybody an extra boost. Things were a little more normal and it made the holiday a little bit special." She said that the extra effort meant a lot to everyone.

The meeting was closed in honor of PG&E Senior Government Relations Representative Tom Guarino, who recently died of COVID-19. Worth said that the pandemic is so much more real when it strikes so close to home. The mayor said of Guarino, "He made us look like miracle workers." He was, she said, a tremendous friend of local government, and his loss was tremendous.

Worth recalled that Guarino was extremely supportive of charities. "He will be greatly missed," she concluded, as she adjourned the meeting in his memory and in grateful appreciation to his service to all our communities. The city of Lafayette also adjourned its recent council meeting in honor of Guarino.

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