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New Orinda Historical Society president looks toward the future; wins Fourth of July award

By Sora O'Doherty



Alison Burns, Orinda Historical Society president
Photo Sora O'Doherty

The title of the report presented to the Orinda City Council, "a report from OHS president, Alison Burns, regarding the 2020-21 activities of the Orinda Historical Society (OHS), which operates in a room ('the museum') leased to OHS as part of the Orinda Library," sounds vaguely like it is from a children's book by C.S. Lewis, which may be as it should be. The new president of the OHS, who was born in England and arrived in Orinda via a long, long route that took her to many foreign places in the world, is especially interested in children, and hopes that the museum will be filled with things of interest to them.

Orinda Director of Parks and Recreation Todd Trimble told the council that Burns had submitted "an excellent report" and announced the passing of the presidency from Terry Murphy to Burns, as well as the renewal of OHS leases. Murphy agreed to stay on as vice-president for a year, which will end this August. Other board members are Secretary Reg Barrett and

Treasurer Bob Thompson, who recently moved to Tennessee but will serve until a replacement can be found. Burns identified the members at large as "the hugely knowledgeable Kay Norman (I think of her as "Mrs. Orinda"), Kathy Barrett, Teresa Long, Laurie Smith and Betty Karplus."

In her report, Burns said that her first priority as president was to replace the old website, set up many years ago by OHS board member Teresa Long. To that end the OHS employed Birgit Rickert of Results Marketing, who charged her "special price for volunteer or community organizations." While Rickert handled the technical side, Burns wrote all the content and supplied photos from the OHS files. "We still have a way to go," Burns concluded. "Plans are afoot to add video of our docents on their guided downtown walks - but we have created an inviting 'shop window.'" The OHS's physical window has also garnered admiration, and the "Best Decorated Window Display" award from the Orinda Association in connection with the Orinda Fourth of July Parade. The window can be seen at the museum, which is located on the plaza level under the library, across from Café Teatro.

In an interview with The Lamorinda Weekly Burns said she had heard the other day that the Pleasant Hill Historical Society has folded, and the OHS had been headed the same way. A broken pipe in the library a couple of years ago caused substantial damage. The society lost documents and photos, and the carpet needs to be replaced. Burns said she would like to start some kind of a school program for the fall or next spring, but she wants to have the museum "squeaky clean for the kids."

The society needs more volunteers, Burns said. She would also like to obtain historic photos of Orinda, especially from the 1950s, '60s and '70s. She'd appreciate photos of the town's schools, restaurants, and shops. Mayor Amy Worth told Burns at the Mayor's Liaison Meeting that she had just received a photo of the construction of the Meadow Pool.

Burns has also been asked to write a book about the history of Orinda. Earlier in her career she wrote one about another location, "Legendary Locals of Encinitas," published in 2012. Burns served as the president of the Encinitas Historical Society.

Burns and her husband Patrick moved to Orinda almost six years ago. Both originally from England, they moved to Detroit in their early 20s. Later, Patrick's job in international human resources took them to The Hague, Singapore, Abu Dabi, Hong Kong and New York, with periods spent back in England. Eventually they settled in Southern California before moving to Orinda, where, Burns noted with a laugh, she is living in her 23rd house. She has four children, two boys, two girls, including a set of twins, all now living in the United States. She now has a grandson and her daughter also lives in Orinda.

The new Orinda Historical Society website is located at: <http://orindahistory.org> and includes back issues of the society's newsletters.

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