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Orinda welcomes new chief of police

By Sora O'Doherty



New Orinda Chief of Police Ryan Sullivan Photo
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Orinda city manager David Biggs introduced the new police chief for Orinda, Ryan Sullivan, at the Sept. 21 council meeting. Biggs explained that because Orinda contracts with the Contra Costa Sheriff's department for police services, it is often a seamless transition. Upon Chief David Cook's retirement, the sheriff proffered three candidates to Orinda. These candidates were interviewed by two panels as well as by the city manager. Biggs said, "I appreciate the Sheriff's Office having forwarded very qualified candidates for my consideration and I believe Chief Sullivan is a great fit for Orinda. He will add value to our efforts to enhance our emergency preparedness and community safety in partnerships with our neighboring cities and regional collaborators."

Chief Sullivan started Monday Sept. 20, overlapping two days with Chief Cook. Sullivan began his career with the Sheriff's Office in 2005 and until his assignment in Orinda, he had been the lieutenant responsible for internal affairs. He had previously served as a sergeant in internal affairs, as the academy coordinator, and as a patrol supervisor. In addition, as a deputy sheriff, he has had many diverse specialty assignments. Biggs told the city council that Sullivan has long established family roots in the Lamorinda area and knows the area well.

In an interview, Sullivan said that he lived in Lafayette until he was in the sixth grade. His family owned the Pioneer Store, a general store that sold everything from hardware to dry goods. The site is now occupied by

Sideboard restaurant. Sullivan's family still owns property in Lafayette. You might say that Sullivan began his career as a police officer in Lafayette, where he was a hallway monitor and then a crossing guard in the fourth and fifth grades. He did later serve as a police officer in Lafayette.

After his family moved to Antioch and he completed his high school education, Sullivan joined the Marines. His time as a Marine was fairly quiet, after Dessert Storm. He was stationed at Camp Pendleton. After active duty, he spent two years in the reserves, and decided on a career in law enforcement. When he got out of the Marines, he married. He has two sons who live with him in Benicia, and has plans to marry again soon.

The new chief said he was "very excited about this new position, and I look forward to working with everyone, making Orinda a wonderful and a very safe place to live." Mayor Amy Worth told Sullivan that she would bring him an Orinda pin. She welcomed him, and said she too was looking forward to working with him. "I know that your philosophy is an open-door policy," she said, adding, "You know many of the Orinda team already."

Sullivan responded that he appreciates the mayor's confidence in him as chief. In a statement released later, Sullivan said, "I look forward to this exciting and challenging opportunity as the Chief of Police in Orinda. I will seek to continue and enhance our effective policing, problem solving, and community involvement, while working with the City Council, City Manager, and the City's Department Heads in providing excellent service and safety to the community."

The new chief's goals include expanding the drone program with an additional drone and additional drone operators. Policing during the pandemic has presented challenges to law enforcement, Sullivan says. Police have been able to take fewer persons arrested to the jail, but instead have had to release them with citations. Wearing masks has been hard on communication, and of course there has been the possibility of exposure to COVID-19. But then, Sullivan says, COVID has made everything from grocery shopping to policing more difficult.

Although nothing extraordinary is expected for Halloween, Sullivan knows that it will bring up memories of the unfortunate event two years ago. There will be a couple of additional officers out and about to set people's minds at ease. He's more worried about distracted driving and speeding. Remember, he urges, speeding and blowing through stop signs will only save a couple of minutes, and can cost lives.

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