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Two recipients, Thomas and Fraser, awarded Lafayette Citizen of the Year

By Lou Fancher



Bill Fraser Photo Sara Regan

The 2021 Lafayette Citizen of the Year announced in mid-February has been awarded to not one, but two exceptional residents: longtime science teacher and crusader for environmental sustainability Janet Thomas, and Bill Fraser, whose astute guidance and deep humanity as an athletic coach and Scouts leader has influenced generations of young people in the community.

"I had a trifecta of Janets on the day I was phoned," says Fraser. "I found out about the award in a phone call from Janet Cronk, a previous Citizen of the Year winner. I was on my way to Acalanes High School for the girls lacrosse team photos. I was floored. I never would have given thought to being honored like that. It's humbling. I thought she was calling me to refer someone to be a client because I work at Morgan Stanley. I'm also married to a Janet and another Janet was awarded along with me. It's a trifecta."

Janet Thomas, responding in an email writes, "Every two or three years my four siblings and our partners try to spend a week together. I was with them in a big house near the ocean when I opened my gmail account. There were two messages. One was from vice mayor and friend Carl Anduri, and one was from (Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Executive Director) Jay Lifson, entitled with the subject heading `Greetings from Jay at

the Chamber. You will want to open this NOW.` Both were nice notes of congratulations and it was special that I was with my siblings to share the news."

The citizen award recognizes a Lafayette resident - or in this case, residents - who demonstrate a commitment to improving the health, wellbeing and lives of people in the community. Special emphasis is placed on individuals whose actions, time and energy brings people together; uniting the community in ways that crosses generations and rises above or actively works to mitigate false divisions related to economic status, education, race, religion or other factors.

Lifson says both award winners this year were selected in part due to their many years of service. "Janet had been nominated so many times, we had a lot of historical documents," he said. About Fraser, he said, "Bill Fraser grew up here in Lafayette. He graduated from Acalanes in 1975. He is described as a Champion of coaching. It doesn't matter if its football, lacrosse, Boy Scouts or Little League, Bill gives from the heart. He does it for the greater good for young men and women in our community."

Fraser has held leadership or coaching positions in the Lamorinda area for over 20 years. Referring to his work with youth in the Lafayette Little League, MOL football, Acalanes girls lacrosse, Acalanes football programs and Scouts, people who nominated Fraser said he is tireless, generous, positive and empowering. His volunteer activities on various boards and commissions receive equal praise and earnest statements about the under recognition of his role and impact as a mentor to people of all ages.

Thomas has been a galvanizer for decades and proves in a long list of achievements to be foundational to Lafayette as a progressive city when it comes to the environment, healthy living and well-being. Having established a long career at Campolindo and Acalanes as an Environmental Science and Chemistry teacher, she retired, but Lifson says "she got her second wind and has not stopped." Not stopping had Thomas working to create the Lafayette Community Garden & Learning Center, championing the Lafayette Farmers' Market and volunteering as a founding member of Sustainable Lafayette. She with others created the city's Environmental Task Force and is currently chairing the city's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Committee.

Asked to share perspectives on the last few years during the pandemic and thoughts that bring hope into the picture of the future, Thomas says, "This has been a difficult past two years for most, especially families with children and service workers. Not only have we all been faced with concerns about COVID, but growing political polarization, social inequities and climate change are very real. I am so glad that schools have opened again but know that teachers, families, healthcare workers, many businesses and others need our

continued support as they get back to a new normal. "Our community of Lafayette - neighbors and friends, the natural environment, the community garden, my family - continue to be dependable sources of peace, joy and grounding for which I am very grateful. I'm thrilled that we'll be opening the community garden to the public again March 12th."

Fraser says, "After two years of what we've all been through, together and separately, it strikes me as almost poetic to receive this award. Being with young people who had been basically locked in their houses, starting camps of 12 young people and one coach, outdoors, gathering once or twice a week for an hour - immediately I and the other coaches realized how important psychologically this was for kids. We played by the (county) rules and the sheer joy on these kids' faces was not lost on any of us. I remember coming out of that and going into the winter of 2020, when it wasn't clear if in spring 2021 the state would allow high school sports to play at all . and then they did. It wasn't a normal season, but it was something. Now, a year after that with the lacrosse team right now, it's important that every girl athlete has the best season ever. It's poignant to me, because you just don't know what will happen."

Hope it seems, for the two award-winning citizens, arrives in looking back just long enough to gather energy and excitement for continuing the good work they do in the community.



Janet Thomas

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