



Published November 22nd, 2023

Council recognizes longtime LLLCF Executive Director Needel upon retiring

By Lou Fancher

The city council and members of the Lafayette community at the Oct. 23 council meeting honored Beth Needel, Executive Director of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation, upon her retirement. Mayor Carl Anduri thanked Needel for her contributions over the past 10 years, recalling at the time she was hired a Lafayette Vista headline: "Impossibly, Impressively Qualified." Anduri said because it was in the news publication Vista "it had to be true" and it described the skills she brought to Lafayette. "What you brought was a real spirit to get things done, a real understanding of the community and the desire to serve all ages in the community," Anduri said.

The presentation had begun with Needel introducing a short video created for the foundation over the Labor Day weekend in 2022. On the video, a number of people expressed appreciation for the library, highlighting in their comments that "it is teeming with opportunities and offerings accessible to all people," and suggesting "a thriving library is the key to a healthy community" that "provides a sense of belonging to all" and is "a stress reliever."

Rita Iorfida in public comments made in person at the meeting spoke as a founding board member of the library to Needel's reliability and said, "She's always come through for us."

Iorfida was swiftly seconded by Karen Mulvaney, who said Needel brought "exactly what was needed" to the foundation and was "a tremendous team builder." Needel's relationships within the community, Mulvaney said, were exemplary and had "blossomed" while her focus from day one had remained always about the group, the people who came to the library, more than about Needel herself.

LLLCF president Lisa Speigler first met Needel virtually during the pandemic. "Beth was a person who dug deep to bring us back to what the library really offers: a sense of place, a sense of connection; grounding our community at a time when we needed just that. The programs and events that Beth and her team spearheaded during the pandemic kept the foundation running and thriving." Speigler specifically mentioned the Virtual Night held at the library that at the time was "groundbreaking, creative, thoughtful, and made people feel like a community." Needel, she suggested, was a visionary who brought programs such as the Swell Center that benefits teens, pre-teens and now, seniors.

Suzy Pak was on the Foundation board's hiring committee 10 years ago when Needel was a candidate for the executive director position. She remembered thinking that while Needel would be coming from a leadership position with Oakland Zoo, the library was a home for people, not animals. She wondered about possible outcomes, then realized animals and people have in common the same need for care, nurturing, and maximum use of resources. Thanking Needel for her contributions that expanded the vision of what the library could be, she said, "You're a great ambassador of Lafayette."

In a phone interview two weeks later, Needel said her departure from the library is timely. "I've been there 10-and-a-half-years and I think every person has just so much excitement and creativity to put toward any job. I thought fresh leadership would do the organization good. I could have done the job forever, but you can get comfortable and stagnant. I just felt it was good for me and good for the organization to bring in someone new."

Although she's at an age when some people retire, Needel is not considering that the primary option ahead. She plans to acquaint herself with treasured activities - first mentioning walking "Goldie," the beloved rescue dog whose full name is Golda My Dear (a clear riff on the late Golda Meir, who was the fourth prime minister of Israel) and jokes the family pet is her "nonprofit-style gold perk" because she was allowed to bring the dog to work every day. Other hobbies such as reading, playing guitar, puttering around with clay, and traveling are also on the horizon. She's serving on several boards and a task force and says, "I'm going to take the next six months and see what comes my way. I know that every time I open up to something new, really cool jobs come my way."

Needel is most proud of having established the Swell Center, where she said kids meet kids from outside of their own schools or inner circles and people interact in-person in real time, not on cell phones. With the library foundation conducting a search for a good fit for the "next big thing, whatever that is," Needel said the staff is "strong, with really smart women in the foundation office, so everything is fine."

Asking to offer a few, final comments, Needel expressed gratitude for the community and its spirit.

"Lafayette is a small town with great aspirations. Everybody has this can-do attitude, which is infectious. Covid changed everybody, but people in Lafayette still want to gather. I remember that first day, when the library re-opened to allow visitors from the public. Those first people who walked through the door, taking that first step back to reality, it was incredibly moving."

Mayor Anduri during the meeting presented Needel with a proclamation and read it into the record.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA