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## Moraga iKind co-founder, Wendell Baker, named town's 2024 Citizen of the Year

By Vera Kochan



2024 Citizen of the Year -- Moraga iKind's Wendell Baker Photo Vera Kochan

Wendell Baker, known to many in town as the unassuming co-founder of the nonprofit Moraga iKind, has been unanimously selected as the 2024 Citizen of the Year.

According to some of the nomination letters singing Baker's praises, he is someone who doesn't seek the spotlight, but rather chooses to be a tour de force behind the scenes while spreading the iKind message, which is to "promote civility and compassion in our community. Our mission is to promote kindness and courtesy, to foster courage and bravery, based on the belief that empathy and inclusion constitute the foundation on which community is built."

Baker's "day job" as a control system engineer for Able-Baker Automation involves "doing control system integration for factories by designing and writing the programs that make things work."

Moraga iKind was formed by Baker (while he served as a scoutmaster), former superintendent of the Moraga School District Bruce Burns, and Eric Andresen after a 2012 incident whereby the Boy Scouts of America denied Andresen's son the privilege of becoming an Eagle Scout because he is gay. In 2013, the BSA changed their ruling, but by then the iKind wheels were in motion, holding their first meeting at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. As word began to spread about the organization, the community became involved.

Baker's involvement and dedication to iKind's message and vision does not go unnoticed by members of the community. He can always be spotted at public events such as 4th of July at Commons Park, the Pear and Wine Festival, and the Moraga Community Faire carrying boxes full of free message bracelets, posters, pens, and more. Moraga iKind has donated towards the purchase of 600 T-shirts reading "All are welcome at JM" to staff and students, and Baker has purchased expensive licensing to screen anti-bullying documentaries for the PTA's movie nights for the students (often acting as the evening's sound/video technician). His presence has also been noted at the town's elementary schools and at Campolindo High School.

Heavily involved with the success of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), as well as, DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging), Baker has created laminated posters expressing messages of kindness and tolerance. He encourages students to "Be an Upstander" when it comes to bullying by urging them to: "refuse to be a bystander; lend a hand; alert an adult; stop spreading hurtful messages; speak up; be a friend; respect differences; use welcoming language; listen to others; and encourage discussions."

"We've tried to reach out to other school districts," Baker stated, "but, it's been hit and miss. I've distributed a lot of things to the Rainbow Community Center in Concord."

Baker started spreading the organization's word by attending various town meetings in an effort to promote the iKind message. "I just wanted to show kids that the community is behind them," he explained. "It should be a consistent message." Still volunteering his services to the scouts, even though his own kids are now grown and out of the system, Baker's troops marched in the family-friendly section of San Francisco's Gay Pride Parade and won the "Absolutely Fabulous Overall Contingent".

Baker's nominators have described him as someone who "makes Moraga a safer, kinder place to live, work and play; he is leaving a lasting impression on the children of Moraga; has made a tremendous impact on the students and our local schools; is committed to serving by promoting messages of equity, belonging, and kindness; a quiet force; an invaluable asset to our community; and has truly helped make this a better place for us all."

He suspected something was up when Baker saw Moraga Citizens Network Executive Director Ellen Beans' name on his caller ID and knowing that MCN had taken over the Citizen of the Year duties from approximately 40 years under Moraga Valley Kiwanis leadership. His family was thrilled for him, but Baker was worried that he might have a scouting commitment on April 14, the day of the celebration honoring him.

MCN's decision to pick up the Citizen of the Year torch was an easy one. "It fits our mission statement," stated Beans. "We are all about getting people to participate in our town and getting to honor someone who does that is part of the mission. We`re also making the celebration low-cost to make it more inclusive for everyone. "

Baker hopes to get the town's local businesses more involved with Moraga iKind by placing posters visibly in windows. He stresses that everything he promotionally offers is free. "Spread kindness -- we're a pay it forward organization, and we don't take donations. Just be kind."

For more information visit: [www.moragaikind.org](http://www.moragaikind.org) or email Baker at: [Wendell@able-baker.com](mailto:Wendell@able-baker.com).

To attend the 2024 Citizen of the Year reception on Sunday, April 14, visit: [MCNMoraga.org](http://MCNMoraga.org) and scroll down to: Tickets for the Citizen of the Year Celebration.

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[back](#)

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