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## Moraga's New Council Member - Teresa Onoda

By Sophie Braccini



Photo A. Scheck

The November election brought a new member to the Moraga Town Council - former planning commissioner Teresa Onoda. Passionate about plain air and open space, Onoda brings a fresh outlook to the town's affairs.

At her first council meeting on Dec. 10, Onoda stated that she believes she was elected because Moragans want a council that listens to their concerns and shares their priorities. She added that people told her they care deeply about the town's natural beauty, its great schools and the quality of life. "They made clear that they are concerned about developments that detract from the views of the ridgelines, and on the impact a growing population will have on traffic and schools," she said. "They also said they want a more vibrant retail and more recreational opportunities. They said they hope the town and Saint Mary's would build a stronger partnership." Onoda took notes of what people said and she pledged to do her best to help the town address those challenges while preserving our current lifestyle.

Onoda was born, and grew up, in Des Moines, Iowa; she attended Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., where she earned a degree in fine arts. She then decided to teach. "My teaching career

encompassed art instruction from kindergarten in the Omaha public school system all the way up to adult workshops affiliated with the Des Moines Art Center and workshops for accomplished painters," she said. "I have taught all grades in between, not only in Omaha but in Houston, Texas; Memphis, Tenn.; and in local Moraga schools."

Onoda says she was attracted to art since her very early years. "I always loved art and remember riding my bicycle to the Des Moines Art Center on weekends when I was still in grade school," she said. "As soon as I took my first formal art course in high school, I knew that this would always be part of my career."

Her artistry evolved over the years and she experimented with many kinds of art, but it took a back seat to raising her children when they were very young. "When we moved to Moraga in 1989, I met Pam Glover, one of the premier plein air painters in California, and began to develop into a professional artist," she stated. "My relationship with Pam Glover evolved to the point where we were painting partners on a weekly basis for years. Sadly, Pam passed away in 2010." Onoda almost always paints in outdoor locations somewhere in the Bay Area. If the weather is poor, she might stay home and paint under the covered entryway of her front porch. On very rare occasions, she paints inside her house near a window that allows natural light to reach the canvas.

For the past 15 years, Onoda has been creating paintings that have been displayed in galleries in downtown San Francisco and Carmel. Her work has also been in galleries in Vail, Colo., and in Palm Desert, Calif. She has conducted workshops in California, New Mexico, Iowa and Michigan. "When I'm painting, I lose any sense of myself and become part of the landscape," she said. "I feel like I am part of nature, not a person standing apart from it. That's why I feel so strongly about preserving natural beauty."

When she is not painting, Onoda spends a lot of time doing all of the things a small business owner must do - marketing, managing finances, keeping up her supplies, hanging shows, managing her online presence and working with various gallery owners and show curators.

Moving to Moraga changed Onoda's life as she became more active as a citizen, tackling problems in the community, and as an artist striving to develop an expertise in plein air painting. "One of my first experiences advocating for improvements in Moraga involved a dangerous stretch of Donald Drive that Rheem Elementary School kids were using where there was no sidewalk," she remembered. "I helped to form a group that helped get a grant that paid for a sidewalk so the students could move about safely." Another event was the golf course at Palos Colorados, which as originally proposed, she felt, would have blocked the migration corridor for wildlife. "I was involved with a group of citizens who raised money to pay for expert reports that informed the discussion and ultimately led to the elimination of the golf course from the proposal," she said.

Onoda got involved with her art organizing a yearly open space art exhibit, and participating in an art "paint out" and art show on the slopes of Mount Diablo for Save Mount Diablo.

She was appointed to the Moraga Planning Commission two years ago. "I gained a working knowledge of Moraga's General Plan, the town's ordinances, the procedural mechanics of the commission and town council and boards, the roles and contributions of town staff members and the constellation of concerned citizens providing input into all of the local activities," she said. Now on the council she will place a high priority on preserving Moraga's open spaces and ridgelines, and will work on improving residents' participation.

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