

Published September 4th, 2019

Orinda police chief goes back to school

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Orinda Police Chief Mark Nagel announced his retirement after 20 years with the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office, including the last six years as Orinda's chief of police. However, Nagel didn't go far. On Aug. 26 he started his new position at his alma mater, Saint Mary's College, as the director of public safety. The outgoing chief was honored by the city council at their Aug. 20 meeting, when they presented him with a proclamation expounding upon his virtues and achievements. Also at that meeting Nagel was lauded by the Orinda Union School District, which decorated the chamber with a giant poster thanking him for his service, as well as by the words of OUSD Superintendent Carolyn Seaton.

Being Orinda's Police Chief has, Nagel said, been by far his favorite and most rewarding assignment in his entire career. Over the last six years, Nagel has focused on community policing and ensuring the police department

works with all community members. Nagel has also been recognized as having made great strides in bringing technology to the department to provide not only deterrence but also to serve as a useful tool in identifying suspects and apprehending criminals. "With the implementation of license plate reading and security cameras, the ability to develop leads has been critical. Our ability to solve crimes increased substantially," Nagel said. More recently, the acquisition of a drone has given the police the ability to respond and assess a situation faster than not having this equipment.

Mayor Inga Miller praised Nagel saying that he has been an asset to the community and that his tenure in Orinda would be a tough act to follow. "Chief Nagel is part of the fabric of our community. He is always quick with a smile and takes the time to listen," Miller said. "Those are attributes that are often contrary to people's preconceived notions about police, and residents voice appreciation for his disarming demeanor and the time he takes to listen and solve problems. He will be missed." The city manager, Steve Salomon, has been conducting interviews to hire a new police chief and hopes to announce a replacement by mid-September.

In a statement on his retirement Nagel said, "I would like to thank the city of Orinda for their trust and support in allowing me to serve as their chief of police for the last six years. I also want to thank my neighboring police and fire chiefs for their collaboration on so many projects that benefited our communities. Finally, I would like to recognize the men and women of the Orinda Police Department for their professionalism and support to this community. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve and protect the citizens of Orinda."

Seaton said that since she had started as superintendent of OUSD in May of 2016, "Chief Nagel has gone above and beyond to ensure that Orinda's most precious resource, its children, have been safe at school, at home, and in the community." She pronounced his partnership with the schools as extraordinary. Among his efforts, she noted that he presented to the entire staff and the parent community, served on the Facilities Master Plan and Safety Committees and reviewed and made recommendations on all five of the School Safety Plans. "He and his officers even grilled hot dogs to help welcome sixth-grade students to OIS!" she exclaimed.

She spoke of their monthly meetings at Peet's to discuss items of mutual interest between the police department and the schools, noting that she always learned important information during these conversations.

"This year is my 36th in education," Seaton said, "and I have never witnessed a better partnership between a school district and its police department, and that is because of Mark Nagel. Chief Nagel, you will be greatly missed by the entire Orinda Union School District Community. On behalf of the OUSD board of trustees, thank you for your service. We wish you every success in your new position." Seaton concluded by quoting one student, who, she said, summed it up best: "You've been amazing, Chief Nagel!"

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