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Janet Keeter-Planning to Get Things Done

By Andrea A. Firth



Janet Keeter Photo Cathy Tyson

"This will be the year of implementation for Orinda," states City Manager Janet Keeter as she reflects on the months ahead. Keeter is energized by the many new plans that will be put into play in 2009 to address the infrastructure and economic needs of the City. "It's a dynamic time. There is never a dull moment," she adds.

Now in her fourth year as the leader of Orinda's City staff, Keeter notes that fixing Orinda's failing roads has been the priority since her first day on the job. She is excited about the ideas proposed by the Revenue Enhancement Task Force to find new funding sources to address the City's significant infrastructure challenges. When asked about the Task Force's proposal to cap tax revenue going to the City at 4.5%, Keeter acknowledges that it is a matter of the City prioritizing. "It's a challenge because of some of the things that we can't control," she states. In the City's case that would be the increasing cost of police services passed along by the County. To address this rising expenditure, she is working with the City Managers in Lafayette and Danville to conduct a study to evaluate the current police services contract and identify alternate ways that these services can be provided and funded.

Having come on board the day that the City Council approved the contract for building the new City Hall, Keeter has also been working to demystify City Hall—both the physical structure and the operations inside. She notes the many green elements that have been incorporated into the environmentally-happy building and the long-lasting function it will provide to the City.

Community outreach is another important goal that Keeter is working on with the City staff this year. "We have been forging some good relationships with community groups," she says, and she cites the City's partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to launch the first Restaurant Tour as an example. A new City website, improved public communications (email notifications when the home burglaries occurred), and the Public Safety Advisory Commission's coordination of Orinda Night Out are other 2008 outreach highlights Keeter identifies.

Currently completing a stint as the chairman of a networking organization of 19 City Managers in the Bay Area, Keeter maintains a good working relationship with the City Managers in her sister cities of Lafayette and Moraga. "We try to get together once a month," says Keeter. "Because we are small, we can help each other out."

An Oakland native, Keeter is a product of the UC and Cal State University systems. She majored in criminology and political science as an undergraduate at Davis and later obtained a Masters in Public Administration from Cal State Stanislaus. Prior to joining the staff in Orinda, Keeter worked in a variety of roles in Yolo and San Joaquin Counties and the cities of Lodi and Tracy. What she finds unique about Orinda is the active involvement of the residents. "People in Orinda don't just talk; they get involved," notes Keeter. "Many of our residents have worked in environments that give them the skill sets that allow them to give back. They come to the table with solutions," she adds.

And solutions are what Keeter needs as she spends her days dealing with the issues, problems and complaints that are the mainstay of the City Manager's post. Keeter brings a calm demeanor (a trait that she attributes to her mother who always maintained an even keel) and confident smile to her problem-solving tasks. "We are always looking for the good, and answers," says Keeter.

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