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Economic Action Team in the Starting Blocks

By Sophie Braccini



Hollie Lucas-Alcalay in her herb garden with two-year-old daughter Bella Photo Sophie Braccini

The first meeting of Moraga's new Economic Action Team is scheduled to take place on May 4th from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. at the Hacienda de las Flores. This brainchild of the Economic Development Team (EDT) is composed of 12 Moraga residents who have indicated an interest in, and have ties to, local economic development. The action-oriented body is tasked with supporting the EDT on two main points - to create a Town-wide Commercial Ordinance that streamlines community supported retail, office and other commercial business; and to assist in the revitalization of the Rheem Valley Shopping Center and adjacent commercial areas.

"We wanted to appoint a mix of Moraga volunteers, people familiar with the issues, and others who are new, to help us walk through all the things we want to consider for the commercial ordinance, to contact the owners, businesses and potential investors who can help the Town with the revitalization," said EDT member Renee Zeimer. The Action Team will include two Council members (Ken Chew and Howard Harpham); the three EDT members (Zeimer, Mary Coe, and Rich Larsen); one member of the Revenue Enhancement Committee that worked extensively on these questions last year (Fred Schroeder); members of the Chamber of Commerce, business and property owners (Edy Schwartz, Larry Tessler, Allen Sayles and Dave Shnayer); and two residents-at-large.

One appointee is a new face on the Moraga political scene, Hollie Lucas-Alcalay, the mother of two young children and a local small business owner with marketing experience. Lucas-Alcalay became involved with the civic affairs during the Dollar Tree debate.

"We've lived here for five years," says Lucas-Alcalay, "I lived in San Francisco, Los Angeles, London, and Washington, D.C. My professional background is in marketing and lobbying, and I also managed fundraising for organic food and wine companies." With two little children, the young woman decided to create a business of her own that she could manage when time permitted and decided to turn her own garden into a little farm. "It's a business I started while my daughter was taking a nap," she says laughingly.

While looking for a local business opportunity, Lucas-Alcalay met with commercial realtors and researched the town's demographic and business rules. So when the Dollar Tree applied to set up shop in Moraga, she had an idea of how things worked. "I just thought that that store was a bad idea, not just for Moraga but for everybody," she says, "they just sell leftover junk. What was great is that I met other women at the meetings who shared the same views and we immediately hit it off."

Lucas-Alcalay and her partners did not win the battle in spite of their pugnacity. "After it was over, I asked Jill Keimach (Moraga Town Manager), to give me something else to do so I could continue to work on getting Moraga the kind of retail that the residents really want." She then met with Zeimer and agreed to serve on the Economic Action Team.

"We really are at a turn of a corner and things are beginning to happen," said Zeimer, "I'm hopeful we have an opportunity to influence how the community responds to business and as a result, what kind of businesses we can attract." Council Member Harpham, who volunteered to sit on the team, agrees. "You have to grow your way out of the financial situation we are in," said Harpham, "We have limited population, limited ownership; we'll have to change the rules, and if anyone can do it, it is certainly this motivated group."

The second resident-at-large appointee has not been identified at press time; the EDT is looking for a Moragan with ties to the Campolindo High School community.

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