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Passing the Gavel, with a Twist

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Mayor Mike Metcalf, Vice Mayor Howard Harpham, and immediate past Mayor Karen Mendonca, who holds a plaque and gavel she received as a gift. Photo Sophie Braccini

maintain financial stability and introduce strategic financial planning; continue to work on the economic development of the Town; and maintain public safety as a high priority item.

Metcalf reassured his colleagues that they would have a say regarding the list and that it would be discussed and prioritized at the up-coming goal setting session that is scheduled for the morning of Saturday, January 28.

Metcalf called for the election of a Vice-Mayor.

It is a long-standing but unwritten tradition in Moraga that the Mayor's seat goes to each Council member in sequence, since the position rotates every year. Seats on the Council come up for election every two years; two in one year, and three in the next election two years later. Since members serve for four years, one of the group of three does not get to be Vice Mayor and then Mayor. The unwritten rule has been that the one who gets the most votes in the public election will be the Vice Mayor. According to that tradition, it would have been Dave Trotter's turn. But when Metcalf put out the call, Mendonca nominated Howard Harpham.

"I nominated Howard because he tries to listen to everyone and does what he believes in his heart is in the best interest of the town," said Mendonca. Harpham was unanimously elected as the new Vice Mayor. Because his four-year term ends in 2012, he will only have the opportunity to become Mayor if he is re-elected.

Very late in the evening on December 14 the Moraga Town Council embarked on its annual reorganization process, and the determination of who would serve as the next Mayor and Vice Mayor. Predictably, Vice Mayor Michael Metcalf was nominated to become Mayor and elected by his peers unanimously. The evening's surprise came with the nomination and election of the Vice Mayor. An unwritten tradition, which sends the highest vote-getter to the gavel via the Vice Mayor's seat, was broken when Council Member Howard Harpham was elected Vice Mayor.

"It's been a privilege to serve the Town as Mayor," said Karen Mendonca, concluding her mayoral year. "I owe a lot of gratitude to our Town Manager Jill Keimach, the very competent department heads and great staff."

Vice Mayor Metcalf was then elected to the Mayor's seat and he and Mendonca switched chairs, passing the gavel. Metcalf has been preparing to take the helm.

"I have met with Jill (Keimach) and discussed my list of objectives for the year," he said, "she met with her department heads to assess what they thought was feasible." Metcalf presented a list of detailed objectives within several categories: Secure a revenue measure of some type for the roads; improve parks and recreation infrastructure; finalize the plan for the Town offices;

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