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New library manager is a familiar face

By Sora O'Doherty



Michael Beller, General Community Library Manager, Orinda Photo Sora O'Doherty

Michael Beller is a colorful, friendly academic type who has been the interim manager of the Orinda library since mid-October 2018. Now the wish of the Friends of the Orinda Library has been granted, and Beller is the new, permanent manager of the library. He grew up in Berkeley, son of a faculty member at UC Berkeley, and attended Berkeley High School.

When he was young, his mother was getting an advanced degree at UC Berkeley and Beller spent his time roaming the stacks in the old Doe Library, playing games with his sister. Who could he find the oldest book? The most colorful?

Beller obtained his undergraduate degree in history at the University of Oregon and loves books, reading, all the possibilities in books. He worked for a year in California book auctions for Butterfields, then worked for Stanford University. While working at Stanford, Beller got a librarian degree at San Jose State University. He had a friend and mentor at Mills College in the Special Collections section of the library. There was an entry level job as a reference librarian, and Beller got it. He was there 15 years, rising to the Head of Reference and Access Services in 2011.

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At Mills, Beller taught literary bibliographic instruction. In 2014, he was the recipient of the prestigious "I love my librarian" award. The philanthropic foundation Carnegie Corporation of New York sponsors the I Love My Librarian Award, which is co-sponsored by The New York Public Library and the New York Times.

But in 2017 Beller wanted to get beyond the academic world and support a broader community with broader needs. He wanted more of the tie to the community and got a job at the Ygnacio Valley branch of the Contra Costa County Library on the border of Concord and Clayton. He loved it, and developed many programs there. He is hoping to use the "great space" at the Orinda branch for lots of lectures and performances.

Beller is married to Karen Paulsen, an Orinda native whose parents still live in the city.

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