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Orinda honors outgoing police chief, David Cook

By Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council on Sept. 7 took the opportunity to formally commend David Cook on his service as Orinda's chief of police. Cook's two-year term as chief of police in Orinda included some very turbulent events. He began in September of 2019 and was immediately confronted with a car-jacking on Camino Sobrante. Then in October, Orinda made worldwide news with a mass-murder event at a Halloween party at a short-term rental home. During his term, there were also a number of events protesting the killing of Black individuals, including George Floyd, that shook the nation, as well as the city, although events in Orinda were mainly peaceful. And never to be forgotten is the COVID-19 pandemic, formally recognized in March 2020 and ongoing, which has presented a great challenge to everyone, including law enforcement. Mayor Amy Worth presented Cook with a commendation in recognition of two years of dedicated service. The commendation sites Cook as "The Rock that led Orinda through extraordinary times." Worth thanked Cook's wife, also a peace officer, for sharing him with the city.

Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen also spoke in Cook's honor. She said that she has always appreciated the county's partnership with Orinda, noting that the contract model under which Orinda obtains its police staff from the county Sheriff's office has worked so well. Andersen said that Cook might have thought his time in Orinda would be a sleepy, quiet time to end his career. She talked about the shooting in 2019, and going through COVID, with the responsibility of the city to enforce health orders. Andersen reviewed Cook's long career which included 23 years with the sheriff and working with homeland security and as commander of the Marine Services and Air Support Unit. "His service to the county has been truly invaluable," Andersen said, adding, "You will truly be missed, but thank you, thank you for your service."

Council Member Darlene Gee spoke about the balance of leadership in law enforcement. She told Cook that she really appreciated him last year when she was mayor. "You were just magnificent," she said, and added that she hopes Cook will visit occasionally.

Council Member Inga Miller thanked Cook "for serving here for two very, very difficult years that weren't what you signed up for." She added, "Your skills are so needed in our community and our country. When you started you asked all of the council members to come and meet you." She summed up his performance as, "Top notch, A+ service in Orinda." Miller remembered the highlights of Cook's time in Orinda, which included the challenge of public safety power shut offs, and, she said, "just went on and on from there, including the mass event that happened, hiring and keeping personnel and making sure people were doing their jobs and serving as you expected them to."

Vice Mayor Dennis Fay told Cook he really appreciated him being in Orinda. "As a fellow former New Englander, I really appreciated meeting you," Fay said, adding that the chief is an excellent writer, very clear. "Thank you, thank you, thank you," Fay concluded.

The mayor agreed that Orinda had been fortunate to have someone with such broad experience. She acknowledged that everyone has spoken so eloquently about his skills in communication and management. She added, "You were always so responsive. You handled things with great tact and diplomacy, and reached resolutions." Former city manager Steve Salomon, she said, knew talent when he saw it. "You were heads and shoulders (above the rest) literally and figuratively," she remembered.

New city manager David Biggs said that although he has just been in Orinda for four months, he recognized that "Cook is a treasure." Biggs added that although he has worked with many police chiefs, it had been a "unique and tremendous pleasure to have worked with Cook for these four months." He will be missed, according to Biggs.

Cook thanked everyone for the kind words and thanked the council for the opportunity to serve. "The two years we got were not necessarily the two years we were expecting." Cook returned the council's praise, noting, "You all are some of the most professional, even-handed leaders that I have met." After wearing uniforms for 32 years, Cook said, "it's time, after deliberating with my wife, to move on and seek other adventures."

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