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Council Leaders Foresee Prosperity In 2012

By Greta Mart
Staff Reporter
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Profiles

The Gazette surveyed Martinez City leaders on their civic New Year's resolutions, asking what they would like to see happen around town in 2012; what they considered the best and worst of 2011, and what were their key learning experiences during the past year.

Mayor Rob Schroder



"In 2012 I would like to see some success on the repair and rebuilding of the Martinez Marina. We have been working on a long-term fix for our aging Marina for over 15 years with some level of success. We have rebuilt the launch ramps, removed the old decrepit ferry pier, built the landside ferry plaza, and obtained an extension of 44 years on the lease with the State Lands Commission. We have had our challenges with the Department of Boating and Waterways and are now working on a plan to save the Marina for the short term," said the Mayor.

"The best of 2011 was the opening of the Rankin Aquatic Center and the completion of the workshop series "Making it Real ... Making it Happen." The new aquatic center is a testament to the citizens of Martinez and their commitment to improving the quality of life in their community. The workshop series brought people from many walks of life together to form a common vision for their community," he continued. "The worst of 2011 was the surprising change of direction taken by the California Department of Boating and Waterways with respect to the pending loan of \$3.111 million and a possible \$750,000 grant to the City of Martinez. We had renegotiated our outstanding loans with DBAW in 2008 and it was a complete surprise to us that those agreements were no longer valid. We are moving forward in this new environment to save and improve our Marina."

Schroder touched on the 2011 medical cannabis dispensary controversy as a key teaching moment for him as a city leader.

"The single most important learning experience for myself in 2011 was to not let an issue get out in front of the city council without consensus from the entire council. I am referring to the Medical Marijuana issue that was being considered by the Public Safety Committee without regular status reports brought to the full council for comment and consideration of moving forward and expending staff resources. The council has now instituted a new policy that subcommittees make regular reports to the full council of the status and progress of the issues they are considering. This keeps the full council informed and gives them the ability to provide direction, including the ceasing of consideration of the issue."

Vice Mayor Mark Ross



"This is going to be a watershed year for Martinez," said Mark Ross on Friday. "We have several opportunities to go to the next level with the marina and downtown and how we actually shape city government."

"We have negotiations we still have to complete with our police officer and employees' unions. We also have interesting turns that may occur in the marina, ones that are different from the recent turn of events," he said enigmatically, saying he didn't want to divulge more until the situation solidified.

"Martinez has gradually gone up a notch each year and we're going to go up several this year. I'm very excited," he said.

When asked his opinion on the best and worst of 2011, Ross replied the best "was that we didn't have any major fiscal disasters or any financial collapse like other local governments have faced."

He paused when thinking of the worst, saying he couldn't recall anything that terrible, except for the several "passings of citizens that were

landmarks of the community."

Ross ticked off the re-opening of the municipal pool and library as "feathers in the citizenry's cap."

As for what he learned in 2011, it was that "you can have great plans with the state and things can change. And your past can always come back to haunt you."

Councilmember

Janet Kennedy



Council member Kennedy said her resolutions were "to resolve to continue to make forward progress; keep an open mind and an open heart; work hard; laugh often (but not during council meetings) and most importantly-keep a healthy balance-in both life and the checkbook! And as we always hope – that 2012 be a year with no Trauma and no Drama."

Specifically, she hopes "to continue the level of service to the community; to continue on the renovations of our parks; to find regional approaches to work on some of our issues – the improvements at the marina, economic development, disaster preparedness, and to finally get the "Every 15 Minutes" program into the MUSD. Educating our kids to the horrible outcomes of drinking and driving should not be put off any longer."

As for the best and worst of 2011, Kennedy said, in her opinion, "Best is certainly the renovation and rebuilding of the Rankin Aquatic Center and the Library. Worst is the impact of the economy on the community. We are no different than other cities but watching businesses and friends struggle is very difficult."

As for what she learned this year, she said it was "the same as it is every year – everything takes time and you need to retain patience, humor and perseverance to see things through to the end."

Councilmember

Lara DeLaney



"In 2012, there are numerous good things on our horizon to look forward to. In January, I anticipate that the council will have on our agenda the contracts with our employees. Reaching agreement with our employees will help ensure that we meet our financial obligations and preserve our high service levels for our citizens, particularly with regard to public safety. As you know, we have been working hard to close a relatively small operating deficit, and this has required shared sacrifice in a difficult economic time. We are grateful for the progress we have made to this point, and concluding the negotiation process is important," said DeLaney.

"Once we get past that hurdle, we can again concentrate on sustaining the good progress we are making in improving our local economy. In particular, we can look forward to the opening of the two indoor sports complexes at the Waterfront Park area. The success of these two complexes, I believe, will reenergize the downtown by bringing more regular activity on an evening and weekend basis. Undoubtedly, the business ventures we are trying to foster at 630 and 610 Court Street, which are high-visibility properties in our historic downtown, will benefit from the activity at the sports complexes – as well as the bocce courts, the marina, and the Waterfront Park in general."

"We can also look forward to the completion of numerous Measure H-funded park improvements across the city. Rankin Park, for example, is currently undergoing a major renovation. It is going to be a shining example of the great things Measure H is bringing to Martinez."

DeLaney continued, "Of course, the redevelopment of the marina remains a challenge when resources are so constrained. What we learned in 2011, particularly with the loss of Redevelopment as a financing tool for our infrastructure and economic development projects, is that we cannot rely on the State as a partner in our success. We have seen what self-help can do by way of issuing local bonds, utilizing local resources, benefiting from our corporate and non-profit partners, and I think this trend is going to continue. Certainly we benefited from some federal funding for major street improvements (Marina Vista and Alhambra being prime examples), but in the scheme of things, these paled in comparison to the value we received from our local resources. The restoration of the Joltin' Joe is a prime example of that homegrown beneficence, thanks to our local Carpenter's union, the Sons of Italy, and Ray Rainieri especially."

"Finally, the completion of the General Plan is going to be a significant accomplishment for the City in the year ahead. We had numerous workshops in 2011 that yielded excellent input from citizens on the direction for the Plan and on specific improvements for the Downtown. If we can implement even a few of the near-term improvements, the multiplier effect of those investments will pay dividends for years to come."

Summing up her response, DeLaney said, "so despite the shakiness of the national economy, Martinez is doing remarkably well and can look forward to an even more prosperous and safe year to come."

Councilmember

Michael Menesini



As he was wrapping up a three-week long prosecution case in San Francisco, Menesini took a few moments to review 2011 and preview 2012.

As for his new year's resolutions, "clearly there are some longstanding issues that hopefully we'll be able to resolve this year, such as the marina. We haven't been able to get that one done to date and I hope we can find some creative ways to keep the marina open."

"I'd like to see us make some improvements to the water treatment plant, implementing charcoal filtering, and completion of those projects," said Menesini.

As for the best, the Councilman gave kudos to civic organizations.

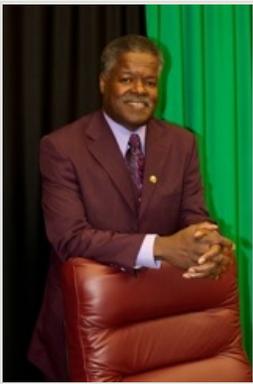
"I have to say I'm really impressed with the way both Main Street Martinez and the Chamber put on events downtown which were very successful, they deserve a lot of credit. The new farmers' market is clearly a success."

He conceded that the abrupt change in market operations did not go over well with him initially.

"There is always angst with change, but it's proven to be a successful change. Not that I didn't respect the previous operator, I did. I approached the change with trepidation."

As for the worst of 2011 and what he learned the most, Menesini left those answers for another time.

Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover



As Martinez's new representative on the Board of Supervisors, we asked Glover the same questions as city leaders.

Q: What would you like to see happen in/for Martinez in 2012?

A: I'd like to see the downtown development and marina improvements continue to move forward. I hope to contribute what I can from the county and state perspective. I plan a conclave of all the stakeholders of the north shore of Contra Costa to find out if there are any regional partnerships that can be developed in order to improve public access, transportation and economic development. Martinez will play a major role in that initiative and I hope local media will get behind the effort since you (the media) will be disseminating that information to the people.

Q: In your individual opinion, what were the best and worst Martinez-related occurrences or developments in 2011?

A: Among the best: Remodeled library reopening. What's old is new again. That was a wonderful way of showing respect for old town and at the same time bringing the library into the 21st century.

Last but not least: District V gets Martinez. I love the north shore district. We're going to launch a major initiative on the waterfront in 2012. I'm not big on symbolism. I believe action speaks louder than words.

It was extremely difficult, but County government found a way to save money and still provide the state-mandated services we are obligated to deliver to all our residents.

Among the worst: The threats to our students and schools brought a lot of concern to the surface. I think the district handled the situation well but it also allowed the district to develop a more definitive [plan].

The Martinez marina losing a major portion of its funding from Fish and Game will certainly not do anything to help improve things there.

Realignment began in Oct. 1 bringing scores of state prisoners back to our county jails and local supervision. The state is still finding a way to provide permanent funding for this major overhaul of our justice system.

Q: As a county leader, what stands out as the single most important learning experience for you in 2011?

A: It is not a new thing but perhaps it is a confirmation of something I already knew. Democracy is a messy process. Leaders need to be able to argue, debate and still be able to arrive at a consensus. We may not like the final product wholeheartedly, but more than likely, our input and what we consider important has been included in the final outcome. The leaders are not winners or losers and the people (and the media) shouldn't fall for that black-and-white perspective. The people – our constituents – are ultimately the winners, as it should be. We in Contra Costa are fortunate that we've been able to do that here at the local level. That is what is missing in our state and national debate – the ability to negotiate for the better good.

Chief of Police Gary Peterson



Taking a moment from his vacation to respond to the Gazette, Chief of Police Gary Peterson said, "My big resolution is to continue to be efficient with the budget dollars we are allotted and work to improve processes."



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