

HILARY BRYANT HAS HER EYE ON KIDS, SAFETY AND BUSINESS

# Call her Mayor Mom



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz's new mayor Hilary Bryant says, 'What's important to me is that my children have the foundation that they can make the world a better place and that Santa Cruz is an amazing place.'

*mayors*

By J.M. BROWN

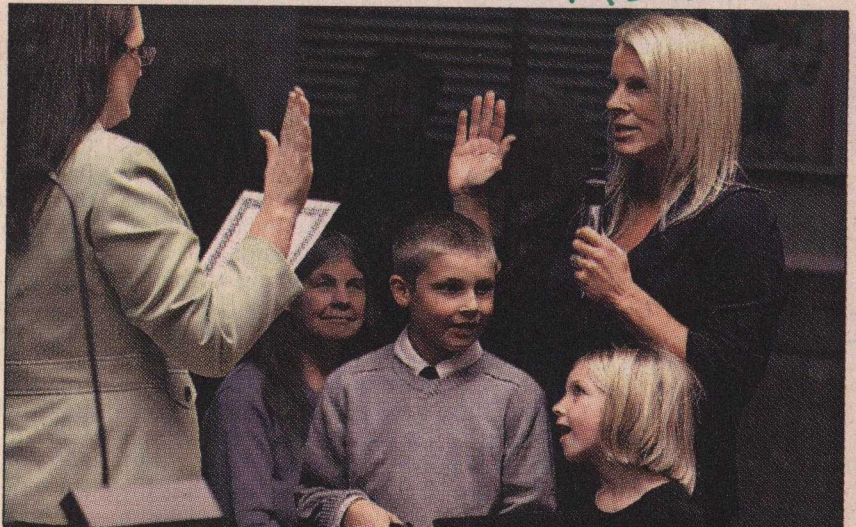
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SANTA CRUZ — As a gift on her first night as mayor, Hilary Bryant received a children's book called "Mom for Mayor."

Given to her by the incoming vice mayor, Lynn Robinson, the funny story explores a young boy's campaign to elect his mother as mayor and save his favorite playground from development. Only he forgets to tell his mother she's in the race.

While Bryant willingly ran for City Council two years ago, the book was nonetheless an appropriate gift for the 41-year-old mother of two, who talks often about entering public service to set an example for son Quintin, 9, and daughter Maddie, 7.

Only the 10th woman to serve as mayor and one of the few to preside over a female-majority council, Bryant reflects a new gen-



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Hilary Bryant has her children Quintin and Madeline by her side on Dec. 10 as she is sworn in as the 89th mayor of the city of Santa Cruz since 1876.

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# BRYANT

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eration of Santa Cruz leaders. Four of the council's seven members are 45 or younger and have children younger than 10.

Bryant's motivation for seeking a seat in city government was to push economic development, an issue she sees as key to creating a better town for the next generation. But she's learned that kids are part of the solution, too.

"I came in thinking I would be so focused on the economy and business," said Bryant, a real estate agent who co-owns Westside Animal Hospital with her veterinarian husband, David Shuman. "My priorities have shifted to how we can engage youth in local government."

Last year, Bryant established the first Teen Town Hall, which drew enough youngsters to fill the City Council Chamber to talk about government issues. And this year, she will urge fully funding the Teen Center, a city program that strives to keep kids out of trouble after school.

Although Bryant has a pedigree in public service — her mother Beverly Bryant served in the New Hampshire Legislature and remains a government affairs consultant — the avid surfer and triathlete is far from being a polished politician. After earning a degree in biology from UC Santa Cruz in 1994, Bryant decided to stay in town working in real estate at Karon Properties rather than pursuing a medical career.

The former parks and recreation commissioner was part of a community group that rescued the Beach Flats Community Center, raising money for the youth and family organization and connecting it with an umbrella of other nonprofits after the city cut its funding. She ran for council in 2010, once again demonstrating her fundraising might and business connections by setting a record for campaign contributions and placing first among eight candidates.

## BUSINESS AND SAFETY

While children remain a focus, Bryant also will steer a growing debate about a proposed seawater desalination plant. Citing an environmental review expected in March, she has not stated an opinion on the water supply project but has raised questions about and voted against some spending related to consultants.

Still, Bryant's major goal will be attracting and retain-



Santa Cruz's new mayor Hilary Bryant.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

ing businesses. She will continue to encourage occupancy for downtown retail and office space and work to ease the burden on existing businesses by taking steps such as reducing parking fees — a move the council approved last year.

But the persistent scourge of drugs, illegal campsites, vandalism and violence will make public safety another top priority for Bryant, who sees a strong nexus between growing the tax base and funding safety and social programs.

"If we can't continue to work ourselves out of the economic crises we've been in and focus on economic development and bring money back to the community, we are not going to be able to do any of the things we want to do," she said.

The connection between economic development and security was demonstrated again recently when a transient man was arrested two days before Christmas after allegedly choking an employee and assaulting a customer at Verve Coffee Roasters, one of downtown's most popular hangouts and the kind of hip business city leaders are eager to retain. The assailant also had caused a disturbance inside the sleek Pacific Avenue coffeehouse a day earlier.

Co-owner Colby Barr was glad when Bryant called to request a meeting.

"She has skin in the game as a citizen like the rest of us," Barr said. "We said to her that we are really interested in improving and completely changing the culture of public safety and what is tolerated and just been the norm and accepted in Santa Cruz. That is what I think she wants to do, and we are totally in support of that."

In recent years, the coun-

cil has tightened regulations aimed at illegal camping and aggressive panhandling while heightening penalties for repeat offenders. Many downtown businesses have welcomed the effort to shake the city's reputation as a magnet for bad behavior, but advocates for the homeless rejected the moves, protesting by camping out at City Hall and elsewhere.

Although Police Chief Kevin Vogel is working to fill persistent vacancies on the force, he said there are more officers assigned per block downtown than anywhere else in the city. He also has put officers on overtime to patrol the beach and wharf.

But as evidenced by strong crowds gathered at recent meetings to complain about safety, the community is demanding more from City Hall.

The horror is still fresh from May's murder of a downtown shop owner at the hands of a parolee who, after being released from a mental care facility due to a state error, came to Santa Cruz and stayed at a local shelter. Recent citizen-driven campaigns also have brought to light abandoned drug needles, clandestine campsites and rampant vehicle burglaries and bike thefts.

"We will fill those vacancies and we will look to see if we need to add more police," Bryant said.

However, she added that law enforcement is just part of the solution. She urges improved connections with social service providers and continued citizen engagement.

"It's going to take all of us doing something to make a difference in this problem," Bryant said.

## COUNCIL SUPPORT

Bryant looks to get strong

council support for her agenda.

Vice Mayor Lynn Robinson and Councilman David Terrazas ran in 2010 on a similar platform of economic development and safety. Council members Cynthia Mathews and Don Lane, both former mayors, have plenty of experience with business issues and handling waves of community unrest.

It's the council's newest members, Micah Posner and Pamela Comstock, who have the most to learn and could display an independent streak.

Posner, a bicycling advocate who owns part of a

pedicab business, said he supports Bryant's efforts on behalf of small businesses. But he also wants to loosen city rules so entrepreneurs can more easily open businesses in less traditional places, such as their garages.

"Most businesses that open have to have some type of building or zoning permit; I want to make that easier," he said. "I generally want to let people's creativity flourish."

Posner, who as People Power's director sometimes clashed with city staff over transportation spending and other issues, said, "The most important thing for me is that the City Council really guides the city on behalf of its citizens. I don't want decisions getting made based on institutional inertia."

Comstock, a software executive endorsed by Bryant in November's council race, wants to help her keep businesses in Santa Cruz.

"She has gone out of her way to talk to existing businesses about what we can do to keep them here," Comstock said of Bryant's regular "retention visits" with downtown merchants. "Any job we can keep on this side of the hill is something that will benefit the entire community."

But Comstock is also a founding board member of the community group Take Back Santa Cruz, which has pushed the city to get tougher on crime. While Comstock applauds Bryant for attending community clean-

## BIOGRAPHY

HILARY BRYANT

AGE: 41

OCCUPATION: Mayor of Santa Cruz, real estate agent

EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in biology, UC Santa Cruz, 1994

FAMILY: Husband David Shuman, children Quintin, 9, and Maddie, 7

up events, she said, "We shouldn't be at a place where the community is always cleaning up. We should have systems in place."

In the end, Posner and Comstock share the mayor's focus on family. Both have young children.

"It's not just my family on my mind all the time when making decisions," Comstock said. "It's everyone's family."

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