

Let's Go to Work With . . .

# Brenda Meehan, Santa Cruz Community Information Officer

By BARBARA BURKLO  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Brenda Meehan, new Santa Cruz Community Information Officer, has come full circle from the youthful days she spent as an activist in the Minutemen of St. John's University, a group of young persons deeply concerned about the spread of Communism in this country — to a job which puts her on the other side of the desk, in the position of having to answer to a public which might be concerned about government, large or small.

"I wrote political articles and speeches," she says of her New York University days, when she was working on Long Island with the ultra-conservative Minutemen, "And some of them were delivered on street corners."

"It was like a forerunner of the John Birch Society — the Minutemen still exist, but now have become very radical."

"I was pretty young — and I was interested in preserving our country."

Actually, Brenda's new job is more of a new title than new responsibilities — she's been administrative aide to City Manager Dave Koester since 1970 and has handled much of the public relations work.

She sees her new role as four-fold — as an information gatherer, an information disseminator, as a troubleshooter-ombudsman and as a coordinator.

"The primary function of the CIO program is to provide the public with adequate information to advance the goals of the city and the community," she says.

This means she must be aware of the various activities of the City Council, the plans and programs conducted by the city departments, boards and commissions and know the views and goals of various civic groups and public.

She also works with divergent groups, arranges programs and forums, along with tours; drafts news releases and writes reports, newsletters, brochures and special flyers. And, she arranges to have information on city issues and programs made available at the public libraries.

How can this feminine, soft-spoken woman function as a trouble-shooter?

"People don't shake me too much — I'm pretty even tempered," she says.

"I'm more liberal toward listening to all viewpoints than I was when I was younger — and this is good for the job."

"Some people are afraid of City Hall."

"Usually, when they call with problems, they aren't City Hall problems, but I try to find out how I can help them, and call them back."

"Older people have the biggest problems," she says.

"They don't understand. They think there is one government — one place they can go."

"I try to calm them down and offer sympathy — not build up a wall."



"I know how they feel — you go into a government building and you're sent here and there — they don't like to be shunted around."

"I plan training sessions, because every city employee is a public relations man or woman — from the meter man, the policemen — all represent the city."

As a coordinator, she reports to the City Manager and the City Council, acts as a link between the City Manager's office and the public, works with department heads to improve the public image, works with employee relations and conducts surveys to serve the community as a whole.

Brenda especially enjoys writing brochures, some of which are "A Decade of Progress", "A Guide to Your City Government", "Property Owner's Guide to Assessment Districts" and "Santa Cruz Pacific Garden Mall".

She's also written several magazine articles, and, in her earlier days, for secular and religious publications.

"I've always enjoyed writing," she says.

Returning to her student days, she parallels the actions of the Minutemen with today's young activists.

"I would say the Minutemen were fiery, but within the law. They were always very well organized and no one ever objected to them."

"In their objectives, they were just as concerned, it was just as important to them as the young people of today protesting about the government not being aware of dangers."

"I feel sympathetic with the young people of today, because they are protesting the status quo and feeling the need to express themselves — though I don't necessarily agree with them."

"I sympathize with the young people — their impatience — they want to 'do it right away' — as we grow older we know you can't do a thing right away."

Brenda's husband, Jack, is a manager at Lockheed and serves on the Santa Cruz City Planning Commission. They have three children and one grandchild.

An avid reader, Brenda says she is particularly interested in reading about the psychic world.

She spends her weekends cooking for the family, preparing meals ahead for the freezer.

"I'm terribly careful with my time," she says, "And I never have time to be bored."

She is always attending some type of class — often modern dance or exercise.

Of her new job, Brenda says a good memory is the most important quality.

"Man! You're supposed to remember a lot of things!," she says.

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