

END OF A TERM

One for the Books

Mayor Hilary Bryant sees Santa Cruz through toughest year in a generation



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Hilary Bryant is ready to hand the mayor's gavel over after gracefully leading Santa Cruz through a challenging period.

12-8-13

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Mayors

By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ — Hilary Bryant's term as mayor began on a harmonious note.

On Dec. 11, 2012, Santa Cruz jazz vocalist Tammi Brown serenaded a packed City Council chamber with a soft and stirring rendition of the 1960s tune "What the World Needs Now Is Love."

The selection fit the moment perfectly and, as no one could predict then, was terribly prescient for the year ahead.

Growing turmoil over discarded drug needles and illegal campsites promised to divide Santa Cruz and the new council. But Brown's melodic plea for calm carried hope for better days ahead with "Mayor Mom" — as Bryant had been dubbed — at the helm.

While addressing mounting public safety concerns, the 42-year-old surfer, triathlete and real-estate agent pledged to channel considerable energy into economic development and youth programs. But the next 12 months would be fraught with more unrest than any Santa Cruz mayor has experienced in a generation.

SEE BRYANT ON A5



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

Santa Cruz Mayor Hilary Bryant addresses the media two days after police Sgt. Loran 'Butch' Baker and detective Elizabeth Butler were slain.

IF YOU GO

SANTA CRUZ CITY COUNCIL

WHAT: Departing remarks by Mayor Hilary Bryant, seating of new mayor and vice mayor

WHEN: 7 p.m. Tuesday

WHERE: Council Chamber, 809 Center St.

INFORMATION: www.cityofsantacruz.com



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz Mayor Hillary Bryant sits between Vice Mayor Lynn Robinson and Councilman Don Lane during a City Council meeting on Tuesday.

BRYANT

Continued from A1

Not since the late Mardi Wormhoudt served back-to-back terms leading Santa Cruz through the aftermath of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake has the city's leader faced so many emotion-packed challenges. What is supposed to be mostly a part-time job — one with a base salary of \$34,000 — became a full-time role performing nearly constant political and civic triage.

On the heels of a fatal shooting outside a downtown bar and a violent robbery at a Westside grocery store, two police officers were shot and killed in the line of duty Feb. 26. The killings were a first for this seaside town of 60,000.

A fixture at press conferences, fundraisers and memorials honoring Sgt. Loran "Butch" Baker and detective Elizabeth Butler, the mayor became comfort-in-chief for a city shaken with disbelief that a former military rape suspect had ambushed the two detectives before dying in a shootout with responding officers.

Weeks earlier, Bryant had formed a task force to examine public safety threats, including how untreated mental illness, drug addiction and the release of violent offenders intersect in Surf City. But anger continued to run deep over chronic homelessness, polluted waterways and needles found in the sand, street and parks — with some citizens yelling at the council and shaking plastic containers full of syringes they collected.

After the city worked to shut down a volunteer needle exchange in the Lower Ocean area, Bryant and the council were slammed for not keeping it from reopening outside the county health center. Months later, the owner of a surfing school — a man who fomented much of the outrage about syringes by making a YouTube video — was charged with possessing countless images of child pornography featuring unwitting students.

Only briefly did the public's focus shift away from crime in 2013.

After the city released a long overdue and costly environmental analysis of seawater desalination — the centerpiece of water supply planning for a decade — Bryant joined the city manager in putting on the brakes. Calling for a re-examination of alternatives, Bryant understood that public opposition to the \$130 million project had reached a tipping point.

Tuesday night, Bryant will turn the mayor's gavel over to Vice Mayor Lynn Robinson, unsure about what mark

she left on the city she loves.

"Your agenda becomes the community's agenda," Bryant explained in a recent interview. "You just had to focus on what was in front of you, focus on what the community needed and that moment in time."

JUST BEING THERE

Big events in Santa Cruz are often remembered by who led the council at the time. Bryant, who as a novice public servant suddenly became the face of a confused and angry city, readily accepts her term will forever be linked with the police killings.

"I didn't know exactly what was in front of me, but I knew everything had changed, and not just for me but for the community," she said. "It was so important to me to do my very best representing our community and really be respectful and honoring of the families affected by that tragedy. I just didn't want to let anyone down."

Police Chief Kevin Vogel said he can't think of any mayor who has been more directly engaged with the public during his 27 years on the force.

"She stood by me in virtually every public forum in which I spoke about Butch and Elizabeth," Vogel said. "She has really brought a voice of compassion to the office of the mayor and specifically surrounding the death of my two officers. All I needed to do was to pick up the phone and call Hilary and I had everything I needed. And that meant the world to me."

Bryant said speaking at the funeral for Baker and Butler, which was attended by 8,500 uniformed officers and other mourners, was more difficult than eulogizing her own father.

"I still feel so responsible," she said. "It was my watch."

But as noted by UC Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal, who inherited his own leadership role amid tragedy, "Not only did she show sympathy, she started the community down the path of healing."

Blumenthal, whose predecessor Denise Denton committed suicide in 2006, said Bryant "realized it wasn't like all these (community) problems could wait and all the bandages were on. She realized it was going to be a long process."

And Blumenthal is proud Bryant is a UCSC graduate, one who came to politics in the footsteps of her mother, former New Hampshire state legislator Beverley Bryant. However, the mayor readily admits to being less gregarious and politically astute than her mother, whom Bryant relied upon much this year for everything from policy-making advice to baby-sitting.

"She should be the one up here," Bryant once joked after a council meeting.

A NOVICE WHO LISTENS

The top finisher in the 2010 council election, Bryant tapped her extensive network of personal, business and nonprofit contacts to raise record-breaking contributions for a campaign grounded in the notion that Santa Cruz — long a free-spirited bastion of anti-growth conservation politics — can also belong to a post-Baby Boomer generation seeking economic prosperity and safer streets.

For two years, Bryant studied hard under mayors Ryan Coonerty and Don Lane — leaders much more outspoken than she — before taking her turn in the council's top seat, a role she viewed less as an opportunity to drive policy and more as an opportunity to drive dialogue.

And like so many other women who enter public service, Bryant sometimes drew more attention for her looks rather than her work — alternately labeled the "Barbie mayor" and then, like a more famous Hillary, criticized for not doing "something" with her simple blonde locks.

Self-deprecating almost to a fault, Bryant tried to maintain a sense of humor about it all while sparing her husband, veterinarian Dave Shuman, and their children Quintin and Maddie, the brunt of a tense year that — in addition to ribbon cuttings, economic forums and university town-gown events — kept her away from home a lot. People stopped her everywhere from the grocery store to Steamer's Lane to register complaints.

"You wind up feeling not particularly good at anything," Bryant said. "Not the best mom, not the best wife, not the best friend, and as a result not the best legislator."

Although not as experienced as some colleagues on the council, Bryant could be counted on to act from a strong sense of fairness.

After the Sentinel reported that council members, on the advice of the city attorney, declined to reimburse a family whose apartment complex was heavily damaged in the February police shootout, Bryant urged colleagues to reconsider. The family, who had also cleaned up part of the crime scene after an oversight, was paid \$5,000 a month later.

More recently, Bryant voted with a minority of council members who tried to keep the limit for public gatherings at 100 people before a city permit is required. The new rule is 50.

Bryant also was key to establishing the Youth City Council and visited many of the nonprofit agencies that

receive city funding before helping to decide which to support for the next two years.

"She is just so genuine about the fact that she is in this job and takes it so seriously and just wants to learn and get the full picture," said Carolyn Coleman, executive director of Encompass Community Services, who served on the mayor's safety task force that delivered six dozen findings last week.

"Just how she opened the meeting — that it was about coming together, that there is a diversity in our community and differing opinions — she is really a person who wants to bring the community together to solve issues," Coleman said.

MOVING AHEAD

The year wasn't all grim. In addition to opening the new downtown arena for the freshly relocated Santa Cruz Warriors NBA D-League team, Bryant led a council that launched a new water conservation plan, approved hiring bonuses for cops and shared \$2 million in reserves with a city work force beleaguered by pay cuts. The council also settled a lawsuit over the city's single-use plastic bag ban and moved to cut panhandling and alcohol use in parks, medians and beaches — though that move stirred anger among some advocates for the homeless.

Bryant also has challenged Silicon Valley executives interested in Santa Cruz's economic and recreational landscape to surf with her. She is featured in a new YouTube paddle-out video by the startup Civinomics, which tapped her to headline its recent inaugural Civinomic event.

"Hilary hasn't really been an advocate for an individual idea or policy," said co-founder Robert Singleton. "She's taken the lead on stewardship. She recognized that the community is in a position that we need to find our voice and our rhythm."

In returning to a less central role on the council, Bryant looks to regain balance in her life and is still weighing whether to seek re-election in November, a decision full of ramifications for her children, who are 10 and 8.

"My sincere hope is that they will look back on this moment in time and understand why I made the choice I made, and at end of the day those are the two people on this earth I really answer to," Bryant said. "Every decision I made, whether people look at it as a good decision or a bad decision, I know I had to go home and be able to tell the kids I did best job I possibly could."

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