

CARMEL

A VERY PASSIONATE CITY

Katarzyna Dorosz interviews
Dave Potter Mayor of Carmel.

FIRST A BIT OF HISTORICAL REVIEW FOR OUR READERS: THE CITY OF CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA HAS REMAINED STEADY AT 4,000. CARMEL WAS FIRST INCORPORATED AS A CITY IN 1916. IT WAS FOUNDED BY ARTISTS AND WRITERS - AMONG THEM JACK LONDON, GEORGE STERLING, MARY AUSTIN, AND ROBINSON JEFFERS. CARMEL IS A CHARMING AND ROMANTIC DESTINATION RENOWNED FOR ITS HISTORIC SPANISH MISSION. IN A SETTING THAT FEELS FAR REMOVED FROM THE REAL WORLD, LINED WITH LOVELY VICTORIAN LITTLE STORYBOOK COTTAGES.

Dave Potter: You are right on exactly.

THE CARMEL MISSION IS MY FAVORITE

Dave Potter: Very much so, father Junipero Serra the founder of the mission, one of our most popular destinations for people visiting. Also, the home of the only canonized saint in the united states who is actually burried here.

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE CITY'S PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS? THIS WILL BE OF INTEREST TO OUR READERS

Dave Potter: It's a wonderful program where you actually have the community taking care of the community, it's very unique. Our medium age in Carmel is 59.6. The average of our council is 59.8 So we are right on that cusp of being a senior community. We do pride ourselves on our services to our seniors, but we are also an incredible community of volunteers and that's one of the most special things about Carmel- our volunteer base.

VOLUNTEERING STARTS WITH THE FAMILY, OF COURSE?

Dave Potter: Exactly. My wife's stepdad is 99, her mother is 96 and her aunt is 99. They live together out here and we are over there all the time. They have a program that they participate in too.

THE PANDEMIC MUST HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFICULT FOR SENIORS IN YOUR COMMUNITY HERE IN CARMEL.

Dave Potter: Very lonely and very afraid. I mean honestly this is a very scary time for any community as this pandemic ravages this country. Fortunately in Carmel we make sure that we do inoculate and we do make sure that people wear their masks. You do actually get fined in this town if you do not wear a mask. Its important that we obey the safety standards that have been set for this country.

I HEAR THAT HINGS ARE OPENING UP AGAIN IN CARMEL ESPECIALLY THE HUGELY POPULAR RESTAURANT SCENE

Dave Potter: Yes, we have a very unique cross section of restaurants. All different kinds of cusines from most different countries. We pride ourselves on the fact that we don't want to try and restrict businesses. We let them decide on whats best for them. We do convene every two weeks. We get together with the restaurants and have a business roundtable. We talk about how we are going to survive in this pandemic. Its very very difficult to keep restaurants in operation as you all know, now with the pandimic and possibilities of communicating disease.



Dave Potter Mayor of Carmel

But one of the things we did do, was to go ahead and decide to open up outside dining. Prior to that we did not have outside dining no café dining as they do in europe. It has been very, very popular. I think this is one of the benefits of the pandemic in the long term. We will allow outside dining. It has changed the landscape a little but its for the positive. Even the resident assosation agrees that it's a nice idea to be able to dine outside, its better for you, its better for the restaurants and the service is great. So we really encourage people to come and enjoy the cusine that we have here.

HOW HAS THE CITY COPED FINANCIALLY DURING THIS PAST YEAR WITH THE BUSINESS CLOSURES FORCED ON YOU BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Dave Potter: It has been a real challenge honestly, 76% of the economy and our city budget is tourism based we are dependant on sales tax, property tax, and special business tax. We will have a hard time to balance our bugdet on our next cycle. We cut 22 employees, we used to have 96, we now have 74 positions. We have trimmed our budget by millions of dollars. So it's going to be hard to provide the needed services. As the community works through the pandemic, and as the vaccines get out and get distributed, we will be all right. Its going to be a tough couple of years. There's no doubt.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP LIKE BETWEEN THE RESIDENTS AND THE BUSINESSES IN CARMEL FROM YOUR VIEWPOINT AS MAYOR?

Dave Potter: One of the things that I am proud about is the administration as it exists now. Our council has realized that we are better off to work together. So, where before the residents used to be against

the business sector, we are now united. So, the businesses understand that they are dependant on local services, and the locals understand that the businesses are important, to provide the services economically that they need. So for once, we got it to where people are sitting down and having conversations with collegiality and not combatively. I am real proud of my council and that we have been able to make meaningful change.

ONE OF THE CURIOUS FACTS ABOUT CARMEL IS THE LACK OF STREET ADDRESSES. HOW DOES THAT WORK OUT FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES?

Dave Potter: Well, it is very unique. Especially the fact that we don't have street addresses. It does make it a little odd for people that want to have deliveries, done because your basic delivery person doesn't really know north from south, east or west. So, for example when you say this house is on 7th 2 north west of monte verde. There is only two houses on this block so its not really that hard to find. Last Christmas, for example, it did have its benefits. I accidentally got an entire delivery of caviar. It was supposed to be 8th 2 north west of monte verde. I did take it over there and return it to its rightful owner. But there was kind of a moment there when I thought ahhh, caviar Christmas... not all bad. It just wasn't meant to be however...

SO, NO STREET ADDRESSES IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

Dave Potter: It's a tradition, we are going to have a decision about it in the next month or so do we want to go to street addresses because now that people are forced to be home, going to the post office is probably not that healthy of an idea. More and more, people are wanting home delivery. We subsidize the delivery for mail services for people that are unable to go to the post office. But now people are choosing not to go to the post office. It was almost \$150,000 plus to subsidize the mail service, we are going to have a discussion as to whether we are going to continue that or not.

WE HEAR CARMEL HAS NO STREET LIGHTING AT NIGHT?

Dave Potter: It is an odd thing about street lights. There are 25 street lights in Carmel but they cannot completely illuminate all the streets. So, in the evening, once the shops are closed, the streets do go kind of dark. We do have a few slip and fall lawsuits. They are the most common litigations. However, we do have a few people go out and have a few drinks, and maybe once slightly inebriated suffer a fall. That's a contributing factor too so it's not all our fault.

I SAW AN INTERESTING CITY ORDINANCE PROHIBITING HIGH HEELS IN CARMEL. VERY INTERESTING!

Dave Potter: It was originally done because of the pavement being a bit uneven. I don't personally know, but I suspect that this made high heels a little hard to navigate in. There was and still is an ordinance on the books, that says you need to get a "permit to wear high heels" in this town. I suppose its enforceable but we don't enforce it at all. In fact, one of the one of the most popular items and destinations in our town is to stop by city hall and get a permit to wear heels in the city. Now this is a myth, it kind of came about when Clint Eastwood was mayor for some reason. It was "said" you can not eat an ice cream cone outside because if it were to drip or fall down that you could slip and fall. This was an urban legend. It was never true.

TELL US ABOUT THE CARMEL MISSION. IT IS A HISTORIC AND RELIGIOUS JEWEL.

Dave Potter: The mission is one of our most iconic destinations. We are known for our beach, our mission, and our downtown. Our beach is world class, it's the only beach in the state of California where your dogs can be off leash which has its moments. I am going to be honest with you but it is one of those things that makes Carmel unique. Now the mission is truly unique. Father Junipero Serra is buried there and was the founder of the mission. He was canonized and lately has been villanized a little bit, but that's the nature of politics these days. It was

perceived that he may not have been very respectful to the indigenous people that were here during his time. That has stirred a great debate but its still an iconic destination and i am very proud of the mission. It was actually a ruin and has been a great restoration achieved by the community and the church coming together as a whole. It speaks so well of them all.

I HOPE CARMEL'S BUSINESSES CONTINUE TO SURVIVE THROUGH THIS PANDEMIC ALSO.

Dave Potter: If you are doing 25% of your normal business you are doing fairly well. This last september 2020, several of our restaurants had their best September ever, not just during the U.S. Open, just during the pandemic i mean the best september ever in 40 years! Which is odd. You wouldn't think that would be happening. It has been entirely due to phenomenon of outside dining, the warm weather, people love coming out here. The restaurants were open and it was so pleasant to be outside. Now with the weather getting colder and outside dining being prohibited, there is a real recession going on as far as businesses go. We are working on making our businesses survive, thrive and prosper. Learning to be more flexible will be the key.

SO MUCH OF CARMEL IS UNIQUE IN EVERY WAY. HOW DO YOU PRESERVE THAT AS A CITY?

Dave Potter: A lot of people want to know about our zoning ordinances. They want to know what makes Carmel, Carmel? We are more of a village than a city. The public has a passion for preservation of our village. Sure there will be changes, but what will not change is our quality and landscape.

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE RESIDE IN CARMEL?

Dave Potter: We are a very passionate city; people don't just move here and say im not going to get involved. We have four different commissions that people can volunteer for and we just had 25 individuals volunteer to join in and see where and how they can help.

HAVE YOU HAD CONTROVERSIES IN DECISION MAKING BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE RESIDENTS?

Dave Potter: Bonfires are an issue here too. It's a big debate and people are divided on this one. This weekend we had 350 bonfires on the beach. We are working on putting a certain number of gas firepits on the beaches to control these issues. They will be smokeless to help preserve our air quality.

DOES THE CITY DETERMINE WHAT KIND OF BUSINESSES ARE ALLOWED HERE IN CARMEL?

We don't really restrict the businesses too much. It will mostly regulate itself. If there are too many art galleries then some will fail. If there are too many particular types of restaurants the excess will fail. The market will determine the outcome. We do regulate the signage and some building regulations of course.

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF SUCCESS IN CARMEL?

Dave Potter: There is no real playbook on making it in Carmel. I am an accidental tourist here myself. In 1971 I ran out of gas at the top of the hill. I fell into government on accident and it has been an honor. Public service is an honor!

ON A DIFFERENT NOTE, MR. MAYOR WHERE DO YOU FIND THE TASTIEST FOOD IN CARMEL?

Dave Potter: My favorite food? Well, that depends on what I want to eat. If I want french food then it's l'Escargot. If I want italian then vesuvio. If I want sea food then i'd probly go to Anton and Michels. There are so many good places to go in town its just a matter of what you want. I can honestly say there is not a bad restaurant in town. We are known for our restaurants and our restaurateurs. I am proud of all our businesses coming together and working on the greater good for our village. Not just their own best interest.