

ANDREA ORTIZ REPRESENTS

A Q&A with Ward 7's councilor
BY SUZI STEFFEN



When Andrea Ortiz was elected to the Eugene City Council in May of 2004, garnering 59 percent of the votes and beating incumbent Scott Meisner, progressives rejoiced. Not only did mayoral candidate Kitty Piercy beat Nancy Nathanson during the same primary, but Ortiz's votes would likely create a 4-4 split on the council between conservative and progressive votes — and with Piercy to break the tie, some long-desired progressive agenda items might actually get passed.

Ortiz, a clerk in Sacred Heart's Emergency Room, grew up in Riverside, Calif., and moved to Oregon when she was 19. She spent time serving on the Bethel School Board and on the City of Eugene's Human Rights Commission before she ran for the council in Ward 7. With about 40 family members in town, including her husband, three sons, three of her five sisters and their children, her job and council duties, Ortiz stays busy. And it's not like she has someone organizing her council work for her while she's at work. "I could use just two hours a week of a city staffer's time to help me control my time," she says.

It's been just over two years since Ortiz took office, and she has succeeded Jennifer Solomon as the president of the council (a rotating and mostly honorary position). She has helped vote down city support for the West Eugene Parkway, and she has learned about the frustrations of trying to get an independent police review board. She's studied quality of life issues for her constituents, and she's thought about how sustainable business practices would include not only eco-friendly practices but also family-wage jobs. *EW* sat down with Ortiz at Café Perugino early this week to talk about her time in office and how she feels during her "hump year" — the halfway mark of her term.

So, let's get right to it: Are you going to run again?

I don't know yet. It's not that I don't enjoy the work, but I truly believe in sharing the wealth. So if other community members who want to do it and who have a passion like I did come forward, then I think I should give other people that chance. There might be other people out there who want to run, and after all, you burn through a lot of personal capital in this job.

Such as?

Well, I spend mine on the goals I have, and I'd have to think about how to do justice to my family, my relationship, my job and my council time for another four years.

Let's talk about your goals. When you ran, you seemed passionate about the environment, education, Latinos ...

And it's funny, we did a voter survey, and fewer than 10 Latino women are registered to vote in my ward. I don't think people are hanging back because they're not educated about the importance of voting, but sometimes they're not regis-

tered because they're not here legally.

But my goals included clarity around government, a more inclusive process of getting people involved, supporting public servants but also having them be accountable on their practices. I think I've done that; at least, I can see movement in my goals there.

The biggest challenge is the railroad yard. We make one tiny inch forward, and then we stop; they get new people in different positions. In my first year, I went to Salem with [former City Councilor] Gary Papé, and we tried to have a conversation with [Union Pacific], but they have a quadrant from Seattle to San Francisco. Eugene's just a little tiny blip along the way, and they're not accountable to us; they don't have to have a conversation with us. But they have 300 acres in the middle of the city core, and we don't know what they're doing or what their plans are.

What about economic development and downtown Eugene?

With me being a blue-collar worker, I think other people have a bigger picture of what economic development means

statewide and nationwide, but I see jobs for my constituents, family-wage jobs so moms in my ward only have to work two jobs, or, heaven forbid, *one* job, to take care of their kids and have health care. But some of the taxes and tax breaks are a state issue: We're just giving the state away, and we don't even have enough money to educate our kids.

How do you feel about the split in the City Council? Is it frustrating?

It's balanced, and I'm OK with that. It's funny, I look at my voting bloc [Bonny Bettman, Betty Taylor and Alan Zelenka], and it's interesting how we get to the same conclusion but from different paths. Whatever Bonny's philosophies are or Betty's, or now Alan's, they're not the same priorities or views as mine, but we tend to get to the same place. ... But I don't usually have interactions with anybody outside of council meetings. Jennifer [Solomon] referred to "the other half of the council" the other day, and I was like, hold on! We're not bosom buddies, we don't go to lunch, we don't hang out.

What about the other "other half of the council" (Chris Pryor, George Poling, Mike Clark and Jennifer Solomon)? Do they hang out?

I have no idea, and I don't need to know.

I've been to a few council meetings lately, and the tone seems so cordial. How do you feel about the tone of the council with your two new members?

It's great, and I know it's because of the mayor. With the new councilors, I'm so happy with the way they were treated. When I was elected, I didn't feel welcomed; it was painful with all of the rudeness and the sarcasm at the table. I was so appalled at the behavior in the council meetings. I'm very glad for Alan and Mike to be welcomed with open arms. Mayor Piercy has set a tone that everyone is welcome, that we are all peers on the council. I didn't know what to ask for when I was elected, I didn't know what I needed, and now I know the tone and expectations have changed. The City Council and the mayor have given a different direction to the city staff.

My goals included clarity around government, and I can see movement there.

What do you hear from your constituents about their goals and desires for the city?

Well, I have six neighborhoods — which, by the way, is unmanageable — and I try to make neighborhood meetings, but I apologize to the neighborhood leaders for not being able to make it