



May 18, 2021

Greetings!

These six months with Our Town St. Helena have been fun, exciting and quite an education. I'm learning a lot about the community and getting to know people here.

Over recent weeks I have had the pleasure of meeting with some of St. Helena's younger community leaders who serve on nonprofit boards and local government commissions. They care deeply about the community and are investing their time and energy through their service, on top of raising young families and working. Most of them rent their homes, primarily because they are priced out of the market, can't compete in bidding wars, and have trouble saving 20 percent for a down payment. This makes the community more vulnerable to losing its future leaders, so we need to explore creative ways to address this challenge.



Housing that's affordable is part of the infrastructure of any community, and its construction and preservation will strengthen economic productivity and promote greater household stability and improved wellness.

Best,

Jennifer La Liberte
OTSH Executive Director

An Insider's View of the St. Helena Housing Market



Jordan Bentley and her family: Rob Watermeyer, McCary, Jordan and Gray.

OTSH welcomed Jordan Bentley to the Board in fall, 2020. She grew up in St. Helena and joins her mother and brother at Wine Country Consultants, a real estate firm focused on legacy vineyards and wineries. Jordan met her husband, Rob Watermeyer, at Massachusetts College of Art, where they were both pursuing a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Photography.

After graduating, they remained on the East Coast for a few years, involved in a variety of creative pursuits. They moved back to St. Helena in 2011, and Rob bought Frameworks, a custom picture framing and art gallery, in 2016.

Jordan's and Rob's challenge: No housing hitting the market at starter house prices

They've lived in St. Helena for ten years, and they're involved in the community. Besides being Vice President of the OTSH Board, Jordan is President of the St. Helena Cooperative Nursery School. Rob has coached Rec sports and supports Nimbus Arts. They have two young sons, ages three and seven.

Like most residents, Jordan and Rob love the quality of life that St. Helena affords, and they want their kids to grow up here. They'd like to own their own home, but it's difficult to find a house that hits the St. Helena real estate market at the kind of starter-house prices that helps young families become home owners. They had saved money, but when Frameworks became available, they knew it was an opportunity they couldn't pass up. Their down-payment money was redirected towards the Frameworks purchase.

They're two well-educated business owners who are doing everything right, but they can't afford to buy a home in St. Helena. [Read more](#)

Meet Victor Almanza, OTSH Team



Victor and his family hiking team: Anahi; Leo, his father; Maria; Rosa, his mother; Victor (green hat) and Daniel

Victor Almanza joined OTSH in May 2020 to help with administrative and bookkeeping tasks. Because Brenkle Court is a USDA-sponsored construction project, there is a more than the usual amount of paperwork, and he has helped manage the financials associated with this project.

Victor is in his final year at Cal State East Bay, majoring in Business Management; he'll graduate this month. His role at OTSH has allowed him to grow professionally. Beyond the bookkeeping efforts, there are the intangibles—attending Board meetings, learning about routine office procedures and working as part of a team. [Read more](#)

What's New at Brenkle Court?

In a word, insulation. Prices have gone up and availability has gone down.



The Brenkle Court team has kept busy installing insulation.



Thanks to Our Funding Partner: Mechanics Bank

Big thanks to Mechanics Bank for a \$3,000 grant. We are grateful to all of our funding partners. Every dollar we receive contributes to helping retain and build affordable housing in our town.

Need Volunteers: Help Us Sprint to the Finish Line

With a tentative fall move-in date, Brenkle Court needs volunteers. There's still a lot of work to do-- and it's not too late to be part of this amazing project! Get a team together--sign up for a half-day shift or a whole day any weekend between now and October. Contact Larry Vermeulen at projectmanager@ourtownsthelena.org.





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