



Jen-Kway's staff—Gary Ostrowski (left) and Dennis Snyder (right).

Gary Ostrowski and Dennis Snyder

By Debbie Davis and Maria Kootsikis

Former board members of the Bluff Heights Neighborhood Association (BHNA), Dennis Snyder and Gary Ostrowski fell in love with their 1915 Craftsman house the moment they saw it. It was for sale by owner and Dennis cautioned Gary not to say a word, to show indifference so as not to influence the price of the house. But when they walked in to look at it for the very first time, Dennis immediately exclaimed, “OMG, this is beautiful!”

They had previously owned homes in Carroll Park and Rose Park for 11 and 14 years, respectively, but the sense of community drew them to Bluff Heights. They fell in love with the big backyard, which serves them well for hosting dinner parties and showing movies. Their backyard has been the perfect setting for fundraiser dinner events for Long Beach Organic, a nonprofit organization operating eight organic community gardens in Long Beach. On a scarier note, they were forewarned that at least one of the bedrooms is haunted. A neighbor confirmed that they felt a presence when they previously stayed over one night. However, Dennis and Gary were not too concerned, especially after Dennis’s goddaughter said the ghost’s ghoulish groans ended up being a CPAP machine in the adjoining bedroom.

When Dennis was asked what he would like to share with neighbors in BHNA newsletter (which he was the editor of for seven years), he immediately started talking about the BHNA annual 4th of July party. This is very different than typical block parties because it’s a huge community party with lots of fun stuff to do. (As a side note: personally, my favorite event is the cake walk.) When they were handed the keys to their new home, they were told by the owner/seller that they were going to be in charge of the watermelon eating contest at the next July 4th block party, which was rumored to be extravagant.

They moved into their home in October. Neighbors adjacent to their house, who were also new to the block, said the previous owners of their place staged a miniature golf course for the event. The morning of the event, just a few people set up a pop-up tent and a quiet Independence Day passed without the expected grandiosity. The watermelons served as lunch. It seemed most of the event organizers had moved out of the neighborhood. This became a rallying call

for invigorating the event—then they found themselves co-chairs of the entire event for the next seven years.

Dennis and Gary took on the July 4th party with great passion: a dunk tank, a limbo contest with people dressed in period costumes, the cake walk, a raffle, Uncle Sam walking around on stilts, patriotically dressed pets and bikes for the parade contests, barbequed hot dogs, a potluck, and the ultimate chili cook-off were all part of the party. Fortunately, Dennis and Gary plan to continue chairing the chili cook-off contest when the annual July 4th Bluff Heights party can safely resume. An interesting tidbit they learned: the simpler the chili, the more likely it is to win (hint for the next one.) I can’t wait for the July 4th party to resume—all volunteers are welcome!

Even in this time of Covid, Dennis (a retired art director) and Gary (a retired clinical pharmacist) are very active with their daily yoga practice, watching thought-provoking films on the Kanopy app (available for free through the library service), biking, and gourmet cooking. Gary has become an excellent cook and loves to cook Vietnamese cuisine. With a glint of humor, he mentioned that he learned from the Vietnamese pharmacists he worked with at the hospital

who were over 40 years old; the younger ones, he explained, take shortcuts. I can attest that their cooking is fantastic, having tried their moussaka (they graciously shared the [recipe](#) with us). I tried it the day after it was made for a dinner party, and like most Greek cooking, I find it even better the next day when the flavors lovingly meld together.

Dennis and Gary feel very blessed to be living in Bluff Heights with their rescue Chow Chow, Jen-Kway, with the rock-star hair. They love the inherent diversity of Long Beach and meeting people of varied backgrounds and ethnicities. They believe as we continue to strengthen our sense of civics, we can improve our appreciation of community and become stronger as a nation.



Jen-Kway, the rock star of Bluff Heights.

Debbie Davis has lived in Bluff Heights for 15 years with her two rescue cats, Leilani and Lehua. With 150,000 nautical miles over 30 years, she delivered and raced sail boats from Hawaii, Mexico, Canada, and even the Panama Canal to California. She is now celebrating living in Bluff Heights very close to her home-away-from-home, the Pacific Ocean.

Maria Kootsikis and her husband, Paul Montalbano, both retired pharmacists, moved to beautiful Bluff Heights for their retirement.