

# Neighborhood interview with City Council candidate Mary Bier

By JEAN BARTLETT | THE WEEK OF 7-30-18–8-5-18



(Jean Bartlett photo)

**Mary Bier and her cat Neely. Neely remained a relaxed, sprawled-out presence throughout Mary's interview.**

City Council candidate Mary Bier lives in Pacifica's Sharp Park District. She grew up in Pacifica and has lived here most of her life.

"I grew up in Vallemar," she noted. "I'm the youngest of Shirley and Gunther "Suds" Bier's seven children." Those seven, in order of age ranking, would be: Elisa, Dave, Elaine, Ellen, Dan, Alison and Mary. Both of her parents and her sister Elisa are gone now.

Bier went to Vallemar Elementary School. That's the first time she ran for office. The position was Treasurer and she was in fourth grade. Her mom wrote her speech and her signature line was, "If anyone can, Bier can." She won hands down. In eighth grade she ran and was elected as Student Body President.

"I had such a fun childhood. I grew up playing in the creek. My neighborhood friends were mostly a flock full of boys. We called ourselves, 'The Pelicans.' Being a Pelican sort of carried me through my childhood and it is very much a part of who I am." Bier also had a best female friend from the neighborhood and she and Nancy Murphy are celebrating their 47th year of friendship.

During elementary school, Bier played basketball and volleyball for Good Shepherd through CYO (Catholic Youth Organization). She also played in high school. She started working at her parents' business when she was 12. They owned the Adobe Butcher Shop, known for its slogan, "The Friendly Meating Place."

"All my siblings had one role or another at the shop and we had that shop until 1988 or 1989, not long after I graduated from high school. We had a wonderful relationship with the community. We just knew so many people and people trusted us."

"Yes, I can cut up a chicken," she laughed in answer to can she do butcher work. "Also, having those skills enabled me to work later at my dad's butcher shop in San Francisco and also get a job at PAK'nSAVE at one point while I was in college."

Bier went to Terra Nova High School and absolutely loved her high school experience. She played in band her first three years, saxophone. In senior year she decided she was too cool to wear the band hat. That year she was an Athletic Commissioner. The commissioners ran the school rallies.



**1973. In Mrs. Panasie's kindergarten class at Vallemar Elementary, Mary works on coloring her body outline.**

Following high school, Bier went to work. She also volunteered as a Youth Athletics Coach with Good Shepherd School teaching girls volleyball and basketball. She eventually moved for a few years to Santa Rosa. That was where her daughter Elisa was born in 1992. In 1995, Bier and her daughter moved back to Pacifica and in with her mom, and Mary returned to volunteer coaching while also working. That coaching included not only CYO but the Boys and Girls Club, with additional volleyball coaching at Terra Nova and Jefferson high schools. She did that for about eight years.

"When my daughter was 2 and 1/2, I slipped and fell at work. It was a life-changing event."

She had severe nerve damage in her back. She went through multiple surgeries. She suffered from chronic pain and was prescribed large amounts of pain medicine. She grieved inwardly when her little girl would ask to be picked up and she couldn't do it.

"I went back to school during that time. I went to Skyline Community College and Cañada Community College, and then I went on to San Francisco State University."

She graduated from SFSU with a degree in psychology and a minor/certificate in holistic health. "Holistic health is really the base of who I am." She is the recipient of the George S. Araki Academic Achievement Award from the Institute of Holistic Studies.

In 2005, Bier experienced another life-changing event, one that shook her entire family to its core. On February 4, her nephew Jonathan Bier, 19, died in an alcohol-related vehicle accident in Pacifica. The accident also took the life of his girlfriend Stephanie Echeverri, 16. Not long after, the Pacifica Prevention Partnership was formed and Mary was hired to coordinate it. She served as Project Coordinator from 2006 through 2012. In 2013, she became the Partnership's Director.

The Pacifica Prevention Partnership is a special program of the Jefferson Union High School District. Its focus is to reduce youth access to alcohol, tobacco and marijuana, and to create supports and opportunities for youth and adults. It is a community-based coalition, with members representing all sectors of the community, including: students; parents; school district leaders and staff; youth serving organizations; local businesses; city and county elected leaders and public officials; law enforcement; substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery providers; the faith community; mental health professionals; civic and volunteer groups. It is funded by two grants. One is a Drug-Free Communities federal grant from the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The Partnership is also funded by a brand new community-based partnership grant from the County.

"I believe with all my heart that my nephew gave me a job to do," she said emphatically, "to reduce youth substance abuse."

Bier understands the agony of substance abuse. Those very painkillers she was prescribed for her chronic back pain, opioids, created an addiction. It wasn't noticeable those first few years. She went to school, she held down a job. But eventually her family noticed and they saved her. They did an intervention.

"I feel very blessed."

Along with her work with the Pacifica Prevention Partnership, Bier also works as the facilitator for the Pacifica Collaborative. The Pacifica Collaborative is a monthly meeting where people gather over a meal to share resources to enrich the community. It is one part of the North County Outreach Collaborative, which is additionally made up of the following agencies: the Pacifica Resource Center, the Daly City Partnership, the Daly City Youth Health Center, Star Vista and HealthRight360. The mission of the NCOC is to connect people to services and reduce the stigma of accessing services through relationships, outreach and information.

On a personal level, Bier knows the importance of these agencies.

"In 2005 and 2006, I was really struggling financially and the Pacifica Resource Center helped me so much."

While Bier was working, she was not making enough money to live. The PRC helped her with food, and at times with electricity and rent. They helped her with her budget and her credit. The single mom also signed up for PRC's "Adopt a Family" holiday program. This program matches eligible families with donors/adopters from the community to help struggling families receive a special delivery of holiday cheer. The City Council candidate said she felt very proud to be part of this experience. Several years later, when she became more financially stable, she and her daughter were equally proud to become donors/adopters.

"I can't say enough about the Pacifica Resource Center. They really care. They want to help and they do help."

Mary loves her hometown.

"The first word that comes to mind when it comes to Pacifica is collaboration. I've seen the City of Pacifica come together over and over again for causes. That is one of our strengths. I also see that despite that, right now our City is so divided. And it breaks my heart. I think the only way we can move forward with anything is by coming together, which we know how to do.

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"All of this is why I decided to run for City Council. I am representing people who so often don't have a seat at the table and need their voices heard. Right now I am knocking on doors and have talked to hundreds of people – just a beginning – to understand the different issues in the different neighborhoods. I am collecting data on this and putting it in a logical model so

something can be done about it. Social justice really defines so much of what I am hearing. People often will say 'social justice, those are jargon words.' But it is not jargon. It is needed.

"My biggest goal, whether I am elected or not, is to represent people who might feel unrepresented – to get information to them."

Bier's community outreach is extensive. She works with two youth councils. Her main youth work is with The Pacifica Prevention Partnership's youth council: Be The Change Youth Council. As such, she works weekly with 15 to 20 youth participating in substance use prevention strategies. She additionally is the PB&R liaison to the City of Pacifica's Youth Advisory Board. She has also served on the board of Pacific Coast TV, has been on the Steering Committee for the North County Prevention Partnership, and annually, on Earth Day, she is the Pacifica Beach Coalition site captain at Jonny and Stephanie's accident site on Lakeside Avenue. Recently she returned with four of our youth from a week-long training/partnership-for-prevention conference in Florida, presented by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America.

"As I run for City Council, I think it is important to share that I have been doing policy work for some time. I've worked with city leaders all over the county, the County Board of Supervisors, the city leaders in South City, Half Moon Bay, Daly

City and San Mateo. These are very strong relationships regionally and very much needed so that we can all work together to benefit our youth."

Recently Bier was nominated by one of her coalition's partnering agencies, Youth Leadership Institute, to be part of a program through an agency called Urban Habitat. A social justice group based out of Oakland, Urban Habitat "works to democratize power and advance equitable policies to create a just and connected Bay Area for low-income communities and communities of color." The program, through Urban Habitat, is BCLI (Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute).

"BCLI is a six-month intensive program. What they do is educate young people of color, mostly, to participate on boards and commissions across the region. I arrived for the program and I was the oldest, whitest person in the room and I learned things that I did not learn in college or in high school. My eyes were open so wide to the oppression and to the inequity in our region. I just couldn't close my eyes anymore after that. We learned about housing, transportation and land zoning, and they put justice after all the things that they do. When I was going through the BCLI program, it was about the same time that all the people were evicted out of Pacific Skies Estates. So that led me into doing housing and tenants' protection work with Pacifica Housing-4-All."

"Like so many, I am not at all one of the 1 percent," Bier stated. "I understand people struggle with money issues. I'm also one of the many who pays more than 50 percent of my income to rent. Recently, our city's one day homeless count came out and it is the largest in San Mateo County."

She admits to fretting over the generosity required of others to help her run for City Council. Recently there was a fundraiser held for her at Sheldance Orchid Gardens here in town.

"People paid \$25 to hear music, have food, enjoy the beauty of Sheldance and talk to me," she exclaimed. "But I wasn't able to get everyone's name who came to the event and I can't tell you how much this hurts my heart. I know that \$25 is a lot of money for many. I still use my PRC budget template to figure out if I have a spare \$25 to offer somebody. I am writing thank you notes."

Bier is well aware that a number of people have issues with things not always changing in their hometown with the speed they would like.

"Things take time. It took us four years to pass the Social Host Ordinance here." (The ordinance holds adults accountable for hosting, or knowingly providing a place for underage drinking to occur.)



(Jean Bartlett photo.) **Mary believes there must be transparency from those in leadership positions.**

"You have to do everything in a logical manner. You assess things, what does our community need, what do they want? How can we collect data to find out what is really happening? Then you have to build capacity – meaning what do we have the money to do, how can we get resources to do that, who can we bring to the table? What can be done with the capacity that we have? Then you have a full session of planning, this takes time. Then you implement, that takes time. Then you see how it went, you do the evaluation, and then you change things according to that. If you are not doing things logically, nothing is going to happen."

"But if there is no transparency from our leaders, then people are not going to understand this. Whether I get a seat on Council or not, I am committed to having a platform that I can share information that Pacificans will get used to coming to, where I can do weekly updates – this is what is happening in our City, this is what happened at the meeting, so I can be a voice for

people who can't go to City Council meetings, or people who don't know how to be civically engaged. I teach young people how to be civically engaged and they are engaging with our public officials. But it's not something you just know. If people understand things, like the work plan of Pacifica for instance, then they won't be so irritated that things take a long time. People need to understand what is going on, what is being added or dropped, people need the full picture.

"Pacifans are passionate about their city. Still, I believe you have to be efficient with your meetings. There is no reason for City Council Meetings to run till 1 in the morning, every meeting or every other meeting. There has to be strong facilitation of the process. It is essential to do your homework, to read through the packet, so that you are ready to answer the questions put in front of you."

One of the big issues going on in Pacifica is sea level rise.

"This is the huge topic and people are demanding answers and want my stance right now on sea level rise. But I will do my homework first. I am watching and re-watching the recorded meetings. I believe that we have to protect people and property to the best of our ability. But if you don't educate yourself on sea level rise, if you don't have any plan for retreat – in 30 years the problems will be here and they will be massive.

"Right now there is so much fear. The words 'managed retreat' scare people. What are insurance companies going to do? I don't know anyone, anywhere, who has complete answers to sea level rise at this point in time. I am learning about sea level rise as fast as I can so that when elected, I can make informed, logical decisions based on facts.

"The City is doing assessments. They are bringing in qualified groups to show us options. You have to listen to these people that are putting their time in. We have to work regionally. We are not the only city on the coast."

Mary is turn 50 in August and on August 19, there will be a fundraiser at Breakers Restaurant in Rockaway.

"We are going for \$50 at 50," she laughed. "I need money to run. I feel uncomfortable about that but it's true."

"By the way," she added, "I think it is very cool that we have so many strong women running for City Council."

To help candidate Mary Bier run for Pacifica City Council, a check can be made out to Mary Bier for City Council 2018 and sent to: Mary Bier for City Council 2018, P.O. Box 1764, Pacifica, CA 94044. To learn more about Mary, visit her on Facebook and also on her website at: [www.marybier.com](http://www.marybier.com). Contact her at: [mary@marybier.com](mailto:mary@marybier.com). Social media: [Mary Bier#WeWantBier2018](https://www.facebook.com/MaryBierWeWantBier2018).

If you are looking for Mary, you might find her at one of her many favorite Pacifica spots, which include: walking on Mori Point, visiting the Pier, enjoying her old childhood haunts in Vallemar, riding her bike on "our beautiful trail" from Sharp Park to Linda Mar, or looking for sea glass and shells on the beach in Rockaway – the latter which she did time and time again with her mom.



### A Bartlett's Biographies Headliner

Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco.