

talking,” he said.

“I think somebody like a Pat Hull is going to be so well-received in that environment because he’s somebody who puts a lot of thought into his content, and [this will be] the type of place that rewards that kind of effort ... or at least that’s what I envision,” Ford said. “It [also] gives somebody new—like, anybody from Apollo School of Music—the ability to play a show where they have the potential to be received like that.”

For his part, the longtime Chico musician with far-ranging experience in the field—from studying music in England to playing piano on a cruise ship with an improv group from Chicago’s Second City troupe—is enthusiastic about the experience at Secret Trail.

“I’ve never had a job that was so existentially fulfilling as this before,” Ford said. He also relishes the opportunity he has to try out different artists and approaches without having to jump through a bunch of

bureaucratic hoops.

“The economic engine is not the music, it’s the beer. So, I have the ability to take more risks,” he said. “If I have an idea, I pitch it to [owners] Charlie and Michelle [Barrett], and they tell me to do it. That level of freedom—I’ve never had a job like that before. They are enthusiastic, they are extremely forgiving.

“Now I want to work here for the rest of my life.”

—JASON CASSIDY

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Eye on revitalization Jennifer Macarthy

Jennifer Macarthy became Chico’s deputy city manager last spring, but to colleagues in the municipal center, it seems like she’s been on the job a lot longer. Her roots run deep, locally and in local government—and in less than a year, she’s made impacts that will ripple deep into 2022.

Born and raised in Chico, where she lives and raised her two adult children, Macarthy worked as a management analyst for community and economic development under former City Manager Tom Lando. That kicked off two decades in agencies around Butte County. Current City Manager Mark Orme met her while she was the county’s deputy administrative officer for community and economic development; he lured her back to the city when the job for his deputy opened up.

“It was wonderful to see such a dedicated public servant working on the county’s behalf, and that always stuck in my mind,” Orme said. “You always look around for people that have the ability to a) communicate and b) get the job done.... When I had a position to fill, I thought, ‘This is the person I’m going to reach out to,’ and I’m glad she considered it.”

Though Macarthy’s focus with the city is, once again, economic development, that’s not the extent of her role. She serves as acting city manager when Orme is away. She coordinates initiatives, such as streamlining permit processes for

construction. She works on broad issues such as homelessness and infrastructure.

“Here I have a little more direct working relationship with our local community than I did with my previous position,” Macarthy said. “It is a smaller organization, so certainly the breadth of opportunity and the types of work I’m able to take on is more varied.”

Since coming onboard in April, she continued, “I’ve been spending a lot of my time in the planning phases [of projects], and I see that 2022 is going to be the year of implementation—and that’s exciting.”

Among her plantings set to bear fruit is the plan for \$21.1 million in federal funding allocated to the city for COVID-related recovery through the American Rescue Plan. This includes assistance for small businesses and youth programs; commercial building improvements; permanent parklets for downtown eateries; and, in conjunction with the county, a pallet shelter at the BMX facility by the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds.

Macarthy also pulled off the back burner plans to redevelop Lost Park, a creekside area along East First Street, which the city and Chico State jointly envision transforming into a “gateway” to downtown and the university. She said they’ll select a development team this year “to move that project forward.” She’ll continue interfacing with the local economic development group Team Chico on business retention, business expansion and jobs.

“We look forward in 2022 to making sure that we are continually working toward an environment that enables investment to happen on a smooth basis and with assistance that the development community and businesses need to be successful,” she said.

Orme looks to Macarthy for more: “Even though her areas of focus now are on the local business community, her ability to adapt to what’s needed at the time I’ve already bore witness to, and she’s not even been here that long.”

—EVAN TUCHINSKY



Deputy City Manager Jennifer Macarthy, in her office overlooking downtown Chico.
PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

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