

Equity Milestone for the Berkeley Democratic Club 85-Year-Old Organization

Deborah Matthews, 1st African American woman elected President of the Berkeley Democratic Club



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Deborah Matthews Named President of the Berkeley Democratic Club

Deborah Matthews, community activist, real estate broker and educator with over 30 years of service to the San Francisco Bay Area, has been chosen to serve as President of the Berkeley Democratic Club (BDC). Matthews' appointment represents a turning point for the organization, which will be helmed by the first African American woman to serve in its 85-year history. The Berkeley Democratic Club was established in 1934. With membership totaling 500, the organization stands as Alameda County's oldest and largest Democratic organization

"I am deeply honored and humbled to receive the board's unanimous vote of confidence. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to represent the interests of our members and the larger community as we work towards achieving progress," said President Deborah Matthews. "Though our political climate finds us at a crossroads, I believe that our shared values and determination can heal the ruptures. Together, I am certain that we can lead the city of Berkeley towards a more diverse, equitable and sustainable future."

A Spirit of Service to Others

"Deborah Matthews is a great choice for President of the Berkeley Democratic Club. She's been devoting herself to the welfare of our city for many, many years. It's good to see that the BDC is recognizing her value as a leader and spokesperson for the club. Deborah has served as a City Commissioner for over twenty years. She knows how things work in our town... when to act, when to hold back and how to work with others to bring progressive change. She will represent voices without titles....those everyday citizens who give our city its character and will give our city a great future," stated longtime BDC member and two-time Emmy-award winning political broadcast journalist, Linda Schacht Gage.

Matthews brings decades of leadership experience across large and complex organizations focused in the areas of zoning, housing and real estate planning to her new role as president. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of Oakland & the World Enterprises (OAW), a nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing for-profit businesses for ownership by formerly incarcerated individuals facing obstacles to employment and economic survival. OAW is currently the housing developer for 75 units of 100% low-income units to fight the stigma of formerly incarcerated homelessness at a rate nearly 7 times higher than the general public. Matthews also previously served in the following leadership roles: UC Berkeley Wesley House Board of Directors, Chair; City of Berkeley Zoning Adjustments Board; Chair; City of Berkeley Housing Commission, Vice Chair; City of Berkeley Planning Commission, YMCA Downtown Berkeley, Board of Directors; and Merritt College Department of Real Estate, Lector.

There has been widespread praise of Matthews' selection. "I congratulate Deborah Matthews on becoming the new president of the Berkeley Democratic Club [\[?\]](#) and the first African American woman to hold the role in the club's 85-year history. Representation matters and I am thrilled to see a woman and person of color in this vital role," stated Assemblymember Buffy Wicks. "Deborah is a pillar of the Berkeley community and a fierce advocate for the well-being of all of our residents. She knows our city's toughest issues first-hand. As an activist, she is an invaluable voice in the local progressive community and a trusted advisor on Berkeley politics. I am confident that Deborah will build on the BDC's years of success."

Leadership that Builds Bridges and Ladders

South Berkeley business owner, Gezu Mengistu, met Matthews while he was embarking on the process of creating his business. He recounts, "I had the pleasure of meeting Deborah when I was first starting my business in the Lorin District and she was a candidate for the 2016 Berkeley City Council seat.

Deborah embodies a leadership that thinks in terms of 'we.' She is passionate about bringing commerce and business development opportunities to our district so that residents and their families can grow and thrive. I credit her spirit of service and leadership for leaving an indelible first impression of the district and its pro-business atmosphere."

Vice Mayor of Berkeley, Susan Wengraf, has seen Matthews' people-centric leadership style firsthand. "I have the utmost respect and confidence in Deborah. Her every action is guided by the attributes of honesty, forethought and higher service. She does not shy away from voicing her beliefs and standing by them. She will be a president that listens and engages," noted Wengraf.

Holding firm in her belief that leadership demands placing new eyes on shared struggles and uplifting others, Matthews intends to use this moment to nurture partnerships with communities of color and LGBTQ residents. Their participation will offer diverse, enriched perspectives in support of the BDC's mission. Additionally, Matthews cites combining the prowess and wisdom of senior membership with the current perspective of young families and a new generation of Democrats as a key priority.

About the Berkeley Democratic Club

Since its establishment in 1934, the Berkeley Democratic Club, Alameda County's largest and oldest Democratic organization, has been dedicated to fostering a mission of service to the community. Organizational initiatives include supporting local candidates, conducting voter registration drives, developing new party leadership, improving the quality of life of residents, championing tenets of the Democratic Party, and undertaking endorsement and fundraising efforts.

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