

All Rhoads Lead to Urbanism

Is a love for cities an inherited trait? That seems to be the case for the Rhoads Family.

David, Alexa and Jeffrey Rhoads



Jeffrey Rhoads got the urbanist bug in high school, when he presented a project proposing to reconstruct the historic waterfront in downtown Redwood City. The planning director, says Jeffrey, "was sufficiently amused to hire me to prepare the city historic resources inventory and a historic preservation ordinance," thus kicking off an illustrious career in placemaking. Today, he and his wife, Ann, run Argonaut, a real estate development consultancy that works with developers, landowners, public agencies and design firms to create sustainable and engaging urban environments. Both of their children, David and Alexa, pursued their bachelor's degrees in architecture, returning to San Francisco, says their dad, "to become true urban dwellers without automobiles." David started the Regenerative Network, a 40-member consortium of green building product manufacturers which he now manages; Alexa works for Lucid, a company that makes dashboards that monitor

energy resource consumption in buildings.

All four are SPUR members and routinely attend events together. We caught up with Jeffrey, David and Alexa to ask a few questions about their shared — and individual — urban obsessions.

Jeffrey, you're a planning and development industry veteran. What are the greatest challenges you're facing today?

Currently, my focus is on transit-oriented community planning and development along the SMART (Sonoma Marin Area Rapid Transit) corridor and the creation of maritime-oriented communities associated with the ferry system. The greatest challenge we are facing in the SMART rail project serves as a cautionary tale for evolution of suburban and exurban communities: We see a core group of people who are opposed to the development of more dense, walkable, mixed-use communities around rail stops. In some cases they see threats to their way of life

[and] fear the sort of "element" affordable housing will bring to their neighborhood. They fear congestion and change in general. Some believe the regional agencies and federal government are conspiring to ruin their lives and take away their property and automobiles. We need to do a better job of reaching out to those with open minds and engaging them in planning for future growth.

David, how did you catch the urbanist bug?

I'd say I became interested in urbanism through my dad. As a kid, I remember seeing the communities of Valencia in Southern California and Summerlin in Las Vegas grow exponentially. They were utopia-like...I think seeing the Valencia Town Center under construction really got me interested in building and communities.

I realized in middle school and high school that a car-dependent city limited your freedom as a teenager (which is probably why

16 is such a significant birthday in the U.S. — you get your driver's license and thus your freedom). I thought about how cities were designed and how that impacted the way people lived in them and found it fascinating how much of the public doesn't even realize this! This easily set me up to embrace sustainability, smart planning and good design while in college.

Alexa, what is your favorite spot in San Francisco?

BART. I love being in a space where people from all tracks of life come together, sit, stand and avoid eye contact for 30 minutes at a time. Since I take BART every day to Oakland for work, I've started recognizing people — I can't help but wonder where all these people go after our short, compact journey together under the bay. ✨