

## Peace movement

As the Peace & Justice Center's director takes her leave, a newly arrived but experienced organizer takes her place

By Brad Brown

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**For three years Rachel Morones-Black** has been working for peace every day. The only thing that could pull her away from her job as director of the Chico Peace & Justice Center, she says, was deciding to spend more time with her 8-month-old daughter.

It was "really hard" to make the decision to move on, Morones-Black said. Eventually she realized that focusing on her child was peace work, too. It's a lesson she learned from her mother, Joan Montgomery, who was the Peace Center's director for a number of years in the 1980s. She died of cancer in 1988.

"In really thinking about peace-building and how I can most effectively do that, I ended up thinking about my mom and all the lessons that I learned from her and all the time I spent with her growing up in the Peace Center," Morones-Black recounted.

"The best peace effort I can do at this time is see that my daughter is raised with the most energy and the most love and the most attention that I can give her. And right now I am fortunate enough to be able to do that."

Morones-Black's daughter is Mia Montgomery Black, named to honor Grandma's legacy.

Maternal influences abound at the Peace Center.

It was born out of the activism of the early 1960s, when local peace activist Wilhelmina Taggart held weekly prayer vigils at the Titan missile silos built by the Air Force near the Chico airport. Florence McLane and Helen Kinnee joined Taggart at the site and soon were accompanied by others. From that effort, the Chico Peace Endeavor was created.

Their vigil eventually moved downtown and continues to this day. The Peace & Justice Center, which was founded in 1982, is a natural outgrowth of that enduring effort.



### PASSING THE REINS

Rachel Morones-Black and Sue Hilderbrand chat in the garden behind the Chico Peace & Justice Center. Morones-Black (left), who has run the center for the past three years, recently handed the job over to Hilderbrand, a veteran activist.

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"I remember being on the corner of Third and Main every Saturday," Morones-Black recalled of her childhood. "And going to various protests in Nevada. [That] was the age when we were really having the nuclear-arms race--and I remember going to the test sites and really calling for an end to this idea that violence creates peace."

**From its incorporation in 1983**, the center has been located in a number of places around town. For the past six years it has made its home in a storefront on Broadway between Fifth and Sixth streets.

Morones-Black will remain on its board of directors. Butte College international-relations instructor and KZFR talk-show host Sue Hilderbrand took over as director Monday (April 2).

Morones-Black and Hilderbrand plan on an overlap period of about two weeks to create a seamless transition. Hilderbrand doesn't have much of a learning curve when it comes to teaching peace, however. "I do this every day," she noted. "It's why I get out of bed."

"People have said, 'It's only part-time and the money's not that good.' But the truth is it's nice for someone to pay me to do the work."

Hilderbrand has a master's degree in political science is from American University in Washington, D.C. After moving to Chico two years ago, when her partner Seth Paine got a job at the Nature Conservancy, she jumped right into the peace movement, working on Camp Casey Chico. Her experience working in such Phoenix, Ariz., organizations as United for Peace and Justice, Arizona Alliance for Peace and Justice, and Global to Global made her a valuable asset early on.

And now she is in her first paid activist position. "This will be fun," she enthused. "The peace center is so fundamental to Chico and the progressive community that has such deep roots. ... I know how to organize; I know how to do a lot of that work. But that work doesn't do anybody any good if it's not grounded. So, I'm really excited because the Peace & Justice Center is such a basic foundation for any kind of political organizing that's going to happen in Chico."

**As for Morones-Black, she is** pleased with the work that's been done and encouraged about the future.

"It's been really exciting the past few years," she reflected. "With the increase in technology and global access, the way that grassroots movements have been organized is starting to change with the times."

"Peace building is a very common-sense idea. A 6-year-old can see it on the playground: When he hits somebody, the other person is likely to hit him back. And the more we keep hitting each other, the more likely we are to keep hitting each other. And we've seen over and over and over again that war breeds violence. There's no secret to that."

Morones-Black is particularly proud of a number of peace training and outreach initiatives the center has sponsored over the years, such as: nonviolent communication (based on the work of

Marshall B. Rosenberg); gang violence reduction; resisting the No Child Left Behind requirement that forces schools to release student information to the military; and providing military recruitment alternatives information in high school career centers, among many others.

Both she and Hilderbrand see the center's biggest asset as the large and active group of volunteers. Morones-Black is particularly pleased with the influx of youth.

"A lot of the people at the Peace & Justice Center are in the age group of about 18 to 26," she explained. "I hear a lot of people talk about an apathy they see in young people, and that just hasn't been my experience. Young people are really active, and sometimes their activism manifests itself in ways that are a little bit different from our parents' generation, but it's exciting and it's new, and it's really building on a foundation that our parents created for us in the Vietnam era."

Hilderbrand wants to hand the decision-making and the creating over to those volunteers. "Getting people to again start defining what it is we mean by peace and defining justice" is a first priority she will set in front of the peace center members.

Money is always a worry. Proceeds from the fair-trade market inside the peace center and events such as Easter Sunday's "Pancakes for Peace" at Chico's City Plaza are attempts to cast the financial net wider.

It's one of the constant "challenges" Morones-Black sees. "There have been times over the years that we have had more money than others," she recalled. "When our organization was on the brink of having to close, the community has come together and said, 'This is important enough to us to continue to sustain it,' and as a result we have been able to become one of the leaders in the region. We're one of the few that can pay a director."

For now, though, she'll be chasing a baby who's just learned to crawl and leaving the rest to Hilderbrand.