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**There's a woman mayor for the first time in Mont Alto // Debra Wall came a long way to land top job in Franklin County borough**

MONT ALTO -- As a teen-ager growing up in Hawaii, Debra Wall just wanted to be the best she could be.

She wanted to go out and experience the world, she says, to see what it had to offer.

Recently, while experiencing life in Mont Alto, a borough of 1,300 residents located southeast of Chambersburg, Wall found the world could offer lots of surprises.

On Feb. 2, Wall became the first woman to be appointed mayor in Mont Alto -- and the first in Franklin County.

Since her appointment by Borough Council, the 46-year-old woman says her life has been filled with congratulations and questions about making history.

'This is a whole new way of life for me, says Wall, who lives with her sons, Sean and Ryan. Her husband, Bill, died four years ago.

'Everyone is very excited about it, including my family and friends,' she said.

Wall considers serving the town she has lived in for 8 1/2 years a privilege. She hopes to apply the same professionalism she brings to her job as a customer-service manager for The Maryland Ribbon Co. in Hagerstown, Md., a position she's held for 10 years.

Wall came 'highly recommended,' according to Michael Gossard, Borough Council president.

'Besides being very professional, she seems to be very established,' he said. 'I think this appointment will be good for business.'

Wall comes on board at a critical time for the borough. During the last couple of years, the borough has seen council meetings loaded with heated discussions and threats of legal action and physical violence. Among the flash points were a series of resignations on the council and the firing of the police chief.

Months before the Nov. 4 general election, the borough faced the possibility of having no council at all, as none of the council members opted to seek re-election.

However, a few residents did come forward, saying they wanted to help the borough. By Jan. 5, the borough had a full council.

But a mayor still was needed to handle the remains of an empty police department and the borough safety committee. The previous mayor, Frank Gilreath, chose not to seek the office again because of family commitments.

Wall, who was aware of the borough's needs, wrote a letter expressing her interest in the position. Wall said she was taken by surprise when council voted unanimously to appoint her.

Wall says she is confident about the future.

'I feel that regardless of whether you're a man or a woman, if you can do the job, you should be given the opportunity to do it,' she said. 'Your sex shouldn't have anything to do with it.' Wall, who speaks with the diction of a professional lecturer, is matter-of-fact about her new role.

'My parents were a major mooring factor in my life,' she said. 'They didn't want me to leave Hawaii, but when the time came, they said I had to go and spread my wings.'

As for the job of mayor?

'I'd like to go in there and do what can be done for such a small borough,' she said.

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