

Locals Spotlight: Michelle Arellano, Center for Spiritual Living Minister and Outgoing Executive Director of OHRA- "Community Stewardship at a Soul Level"

By Jordan Pease



Rev. Michelle Arellano's passionate commitment to healthy community building began in her early childhood. She's an accomplished, mission-driven visionary whose articulate elevator speeches would leave you awestruck, inspired, and grateful that there are skilled women like her leading teams doing vital service in this world. Her entire career has been involved with helping children and families, with **Boys and Girls Clubs** in California and as Director for Organizational Development for **BGCA's Pacific Region**, and here in Ashland with **Options for Helping Residents of Ashland (OHRA)**.

In February, Michelle announced an enormous achievement for OHRA; receiving the **Project Turnkey** funding to acquire and repurpose the former **Super 8 Hotel** on Ashland Street into OHRA's new facility, the "**OHRA Center**", providing a "low barrier" shelter for those most in need. Twenty rooms opened April 1, another sixteen rooms opened May 1, and by Fall, their offices and the Resource Center will relocate there with a total of 53 shelter rooms.

Beginning May 1, Michelle has stepped down from the Executive Director position at OHRA, yet she continues there three days a week as Resource Development Director. She'll continue working closely with OHRA's new ED, **Cass Sinclair**, and she reports, "it's been a beautiful transition for both of us." Michelle had planned this career move for a year, and now she's excited about doing more Ministry work, which "fits into all my passions", as she puts it. Soon, she'll be stepping into a more active role with her friend and colleague, **Rev. Kimberly Hawkins**, at **Center for Spiritual Living Rogue Valley**.

Thank you for sharing about yourself and your work here in the community Michelle, please tell your 'how I got to Ashland' story? "I was living in **Seal Beach**, in Southern California, and I really had decided I wanted a relationship. One of my dear friends from high school had met an amazing man online, so I tried it too; "Our Time", and I ended up meeting an amazing man, **Eric Day**, who lived in Talent. And we started dating and we dated for about a year. I was working for Boys and Girls Club of America at the time, and I was able to move my position and territory, so it was about 2014 when I got here. It was a big change for me, and we actually moved back to Southern California about two years later to take a job. It was great to be able to come here, leave for two years, and then come back. It just gave me such great appreciation for this area, this valley, and the *people*. And so when I came back, I connected with Center for Spiritual Living Rogue Valley. And Reverend Kimberly [Hawkins] and I had lunch and we talked about me coming on board as a staff Minister there. And I knew there was more I wanted to do in nonprofit, and that's where I saw the job opening for OHRA. I jumped in and interviewed, and I was wowed by all the people and their mission, and I took the position. I'm incredibly grateful that I did, because the people that I've met, and the people that I get to work with, it's been outstanding. They are caring, compassionate, they are in it for the right reasons."



Much of your career has been serving children and families, what drives you? "What drives me is, my childhood was bumpy. I had a very loving mom. Mom and dad divorced when I was pretty young, there was a lot of dysfunction and alcoholism. My mom is sober now, which is great. But providing safe places for kids is a part of my heart and soul, and I get emotional when I talk about it! Because it's a part of my fiber, it's a part of my Ministry. And kids are kids. All of us have our inner child. So doing the work at OHRA was just a great segue into working with adults that are in need, and it's building that sense of belonging. We called it "BUIC" at Boys and Girls Club; a sense of *belonging*, a sense of *usefulness*, a sense of *influence*, and

a sense of *confidence*. That was for the kids, but that translates to all of us too. And it's my mission in life to work with people on a soul level and to show them how amazing they are."

Please tell a story about your 'most interesting day', or a life-changing incident, or can you recall a life-changing epiphany? "Most interesting, most powerful, it was the birth of my boys. Never the same. Fourteen months apart, and they are the light in my eyes. I mean I just love them more than anything. They are now 31 and 32, and I was never the same. There's this unconditional love that you feel that I had never felt like that before. So that's one, the other is my divorce. The boys were pretty young, they were like five and six, it was the early 90's, and I looked to my husband at the time to make me happy, being young, naïve, you know. And going through the divorce process was very much an awakening for me and understanding that happiness was my responsibility. That living this life was inside not outside, and that took me on my spiritual journey. And I am forever grateful for that, forever grateful."

What's your best talent; silly and serious? "Well, my serious talent is my creative abilities as a strategic thinker. I'm very visionary, and I'm the connector, to bring people together for a greater good. It's like you have the canvas and the paintbrush, and that's the area that I can do. But I do it through communications, through connecting the right people. Encouraging, motivating, and inspiring. And then *the silly part of me* is when I'm with my family. I just absolutely adore them. There are six siblings, my mom, my amazing sons Michael and Ryan, my partner Eric, and my nieces and nephews. We're crazy and wild, and we're a lot! Talk about herding cats, we're like herding *wildcats!*"

Do you have a story about a paranormal experience? "Hmm. Yes. The ones that I can think of, there are always these little senses. There are little things in life that show me there's something more. There was one when I was in **Charlottesville, North Carolina** on a BGC work trip, and I wasn't interested in going out on those ghost tours with my friends. But that night, in my room at this hotel in an old, historic red brick building; I was reading, and I dozed off. Then I opened my eyes, and I saw a ghost! She was a little girl, she was beautiful, she had a white little dress like you would see back in the old days, and she looked like she was about eight years old. I closed my eyes and opened them to make sure I wasn't dreaming, and she was still there. I did that probably three or four times, and then I did something really mature, I pulled the covers over my head and I screamed! But I did look at her and she did look at me, and I can still see there was this curiosity in her eyes. I pulled the covers back down and she was gone. That was my very tangible experience, that I *had.*"



What advice do you have for the young people in our community? "There's so much that I want to say, but to narrow it down, it's for them to believe in their dreams and to believe in themselves. And to surround themselves with people that believe in them so they can see their amazingness. I think that so much of the challenge with kids, me included when I was a kid, is not seeing their potential. And there are so many people that helped me see it in life. And it's books, it's people; when you start to *kindle* that fire inside, you draw it in, right? The metaphysical part, you draw in the energy because you start moving in that direction. Where I came from and where I am today, people would have a hard time believing because I didn't graduate from college, I was a single mom. Everything that I've done in my life it's because *I believed*, and I worked really hard. And that belief piece is so important, and your past is not your future!"

What's a thing people would never guess about you? "I don't know, I feel like I'm pretty transparent. I think sometimes I come across as very extroverted but I'm an 'intro-extrovert', I go between the two. It's not my natural quality to be extroverted, but I like skydiving, and I have a Sea Turtle tattoo that I got in Maui two years ago, my first tattoo ever, in my 50s!"

Please fill-in-the-blank; "I'm having the time of my life when I'm [blank]." "Okay, I'm having the time of my life when I'm in the middle of nature, having fun; hiking, swimming, kayaking, playing. And so immersed in nature that that's all you see. And that's every weekend, every weekend."

What is your most favorite BOOK, MOVIE, FOOD, and MUSIC? "My most favorite book is **Broken Open** by Elizabeth Lesser. That's probably how I live my life, in transformation and being broken open by all the experiences that we have. Every time that I'm broken open, I see things a little differently. Like there's more colors that come into life. If I write a book someday, I want it to be similar to that type of book. And movie? **It's a Wonderful Life**. It's cliché, but again, right? It's transformation! It just kind of fits my theme! My favorite food would be sushi, just because it's *so good*, you just feel good after you eat it! Music, that's a tough one. I like all music, I like spiritual music, I like music with meaning, I like social music. I like **Jewel**, I've always followed Jewel. **'Life Uncommon'**. And **Aretha Franklin**; so soulful!"

Okay, ready for a speed round now? Answer these ones quickly please; sand or snow? Okay, sand. **Whitewater or forest trail?** Both! **Carpet or hardwood?** Hardwood, hardwood-hardwood! **Files or piles?** Both! **Digital or analog?** Both. **Feathered or furry?** Feathered, for sure feathered. **Oatmeal or grits?** Neither actually. **RomComs or Musicals?** Musicals. **Laurel or Yanny?** I don't understand? **Five words to describe the rest of your life?** Wow; great question; *living full-out compassionately and authentically!*

Jordan Pease is a 20-year resident of Ashland, and the founder/director of **Rogue Valley Metaphysical Library & Media Exchange**. www.RVML.org