

Life in LAMORINDA

The Quest for Senior Housing

By Jennifer Wake

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between the years 2000 to 2010 the number of people aged 65 and older will nearly double, and that figure is expected to balloon in years to follow as more baby boomers reach retirement age.

With Lamorinda's population being older – relative to the rest of the Bay Area – Lafayette Senior Services Center Coordinator Mei Sun Li says the issue of where seniors will live and what services will be available is huge. "Without proper support services and additional senior housing, people will need to move from their homes and from the area," she said.

That time has come for 75-year-old Lafayette resident Vic Anderson.

When the owners sold the apartment building four years ago where Anderson has lived for the past six years, he assumed the rents would increase. The catch was the location.

Within walking distance to

Chow restaurant, downtown Lafayette and BART, the apartment's rents were grossly under market value. Although no major renovations were made to his two-bedroom apartment, which does not have a dishwasher or central air conditioning, and with a laundry room down two flights of stairs, over the past four years Anderson's rent has gone from \$750 to \$1,100 per month.

Yet when he looked for alternatives, he came up with nothing. "Chateau Lafayette offers seniors rents based upon their income," said Anderson, "but my friends have been on their waiting list for 10 years. I realized that with rent going up, I couldn't do anything 'extra' without going broke."

Determined to stay in the area, and despite his age, Anderson took a part time job as a parking attendant working for Bill Eames and Ed Stokes at Diablo Foods. "I couldn't ask for anything better. It's been a fun job; I meet so many people."



Anderson stands watch at the parking lot between Diablo Foods and Longs Drugs in Lafayette

Each year, as his rents increased, Anderson took on more hours until he was working 35 hours per week at the lot, but he began to worry. "What if my legs

go out?" he said.

At the end of this month, Anderson plans to move to Seattle to live with his sister where he will no longer have to work, and will spend only \$200 a month for his share of his sister's modular home dues. "I've had a good life. I'm getting along fine, but this way I won't have to worry about it," he said. "I'm looking forward to it, but I'll cry when I leave Lafayette."

Mei Sun Li says the problem Anderson faced is not unusual. "It's not age specific," Li said. "There are no senior apartments out here. And even if you own your home, but develop macular degeneration in your late 50s, and can't drive, then you have another problem."

The Senior Services Center offers Lamorinda seniors free van rides to get to lunch dates or to run errands to the grocery or drug store, but only has one van in service. The van is funded by donations from the City of Lafayette, the Lafayette Community Foundation, the Moraga Juniors, and the Town of Moraga with additional donations expected from the city of Orinda.

"We can't take people to and from doctor's appointments with one van," Li said. "But what people don't understand is LINK services (through County Connection

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where buses pick you up from home) are only for ADA-qualified people who have particular disabilities. If you're simply old and can't drive, you're not eligible."

While the senior housing available in the area does offer transportation, the rent is costly. Of the few independent living facilities in the Lamorinda area, costs generally range from \$3,500 to \$7,000 a month.

"The main problem is that land here is too expensive," Li said. "And even if you raise funds to build, people who own the sites don't want to sell. You also have

to have accessible services and transportation when you develop housing."

Li sees the newest trend in senior housing to be Co-Housing, much like what Anderson plans. "Seniors are buying homes together, with separate wings and a communal area," Li said. "They share care-giving services and are all on the title, but it still takes a middle-class income."

As the population continues to age, Li says changes will need to be made. "In the next few years, it's going to be an increasing problem – explosive," she said.

Carmen Features Local Talent

By Sarah Henningsen

Although shows by the Walnut Creek-based Festival Opera company attract professionals from throughout the Bay Area, the July production of Georges Bizet's Carmen, one of the most famous operas of all time, is rich with Lamorinda talent. Individuals from throughout the community have actively participated during the past few months to put on a great show, both as on-stage performers and behind-the-scenes workers.

The majority of Lamorinda locals performing in Carmen are serving as members of the chorus ensemble. This ensemble is composed largely of students, many of whom participate in their school choirs during the year. Shannon Bruce, who will be a junior at Campolindo High School in the fall, commented on her experience as a chorus member in Carmen: "I feel so privileged to have worked with such a talented cast of people. I've learned so much about opera music."

Even some younger kids from the Lamorinda community are represented in the production of Carmen, as part of the smaller Boys Chorus that makes several appearances throughout the lengthy opera. Although the boys sing only two songs, they have a huge presence onstage and make a great impression on the audience. The group includes elementary and middle school kids as well as more experienced singers that lead the way for the younger ones, like Tylor Bruns, Alejandro Cervantes, and John Cogswell, who will be entering the local high schools next year. As Chorus Master James Toland expressed, "The boys have been a terrific bonus to the overall quality of the chorus."



Clockwise from top left: Stefan Miller, Tim Quock, Robin Miller, Shannon Bruce, John Cogswell

Toland, a Moraga resident who teaches part time at Campolindo and Acalanes in addition to assisting premiere opera companies, spent the past few months helping to develop the chorus as a whole. Leading the majority of pre-staging music rehearsals with the chorus ensemble, Toland thoroughly enjoyed working with the younger set of chorale members: "The young people singing in the chorus are a remarkable addition to a very talented group of singers. The students have just made an enormous contribution to the beauty and power of the sound of the chorus. Their participation has helped create a stage full of people of all ages and types and it is just a wonderfully vibrant group of people onstage." As evidenced by the beautiful sound of the choir ensemble, Toland has proven to be a huge asset to the production of a musical as challenging as Carmen and has inspired countless students from throughout the Lamorinda region.

The first weekend of performances was received positively by both critics and the community. The final two performances of Carmen will be held at the Dean

Leshner Center on Friday July 13th and Sunday July 15th, at an afternoon matinee. Tickets can either be ordered at www.festivalopera.com or by phone, 925-943-SHOW.

Carmen's local performers:

High School Students:

Jason Long
Tylor Bruns
John Cogswell
Alejandro Cervantes
Cameron Gordon
Matt Boone
Shannon Bruce
Mayra Swatt

Middle School:

Ben Thomas
Jeremy Raine

College:

Piper Haywood
Chelsea Nenni
Troy Guthrie
Kurt Krikorian
Tim Quock
Stefan Miller

Adults:

Heather Braganza
Robin Miller
Gene Peterson
David Pinkham

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