

In the Back Yard

Local Garden Clubs: Focus on Moraga

Suzan Ormandy
McDonnell Nursery



Members of the Moraga Garden Club in front of the Moraga Library
Left to right: Barbara White, Moraga Commons; Anna Lum, President;
Nell Sellers, John Muir Atrium; Rena Munson, Library Exterior

There's nothing common about the Moraga Commons. It's as special as the Moraga Garden Club members who maintain the flag-pole planting area there as well as the library garden and urns just down the road. This organization, active since 1970, embodies the community spirit that – along with the fine schools and bucolic setting – draws more and more people to Moraga every year.

As with other local garden clubs, the MGC begins its year this month, with the first meeting on Sept 20th and regularly on the third Thursdays at 9:30 a.m., Holy Trinity Cultural Center, 1700 School Street. Meetings are open to the general public. For more information, call membership chair Mardi Potts at 376-2004 or president Anna Lum at 376-5679.

After business matters are discussed and light refreshments enjoyed, the 9/20 program will feature Mr. Robin Stockwell from Succulent Gardens on container gardening with succulents, a timely subject in this water-conscious time.

In fact, the MGC members are involved in furthering ecologically-sound planting methods as well as aiding in the protection of native trees, plants and birds. Their main goal is to stimulate knowledge and love of gardening among amateurs – so don't be at all shy if you're unsure, say, on the difference between annuals and perennials. The friendly ladies of the MGC are there to help new members.

They also help the larger community with ongoing projects like the Moraga Commons, the "Rheem Triangle" at Rheem and Moraga Roads, the lovely John Muir Hospital atrium, and the perennial garden at the Hacienda.

In addition to maintaining the outdoor plants at the library, the Club decorates an indoor tree with natural "critters"

at Christmas, decorates holiday wreaths and plants daffodils throughout Moraga for cheerful Spring color. They also do seasonal plantings at the Holy Trinity Cultural Center; the Pear Festival and "Moraga Beautiful Day" benefit from MGC presence as well.

Other activities this year include a holiday luncheon at the Diablo Country Club. No member wants to miss the January pot-luck salad luncheon featuring a floral designer. The MGC's major fund-raiser, a Spring Tea, will be held in 2009. Currently, members are selling the revised edition of Growing in Lamorinda, a guide for newcomers to help ensure successful gardening in the area. The book can be purchased at the Moraga Garden Center and at McDonnell Nursery in Orinda

Next month's column will feature another local garden club. The following is a brief guide to most of the clubs in the Lamorinda area. Most have websites that provide more detailed information and most have membership of between 125-150 people.



At the Moraga Commons



Hanging baskets Orinda Village

Lafayette Garden Club

First meeting: 9/13. Regular meetings on 2nd Thursdays at 9:30 a.m., Our Saviours Lutheran Church, Carol Lane, Lafayette.

Membership is \$35 and open to a maximum of 150 people. Note: the LGC usually has to stop taking new members by winter, so don't delay if you want to join.

Contact Liz Schwark at 930-0985. President: Carolyn Bybee.

Projects include:

- Garden therapy at a convalescent home
- The Gazebo on Mt. Diablo Blvd.
- Work with youth home residents on their garden
- Booth at the Wine Fair [9/15-16]

Montelindo Garden Club

First meeting: 9/21. Regular meetings on 3rd Fridays at 9 a.m. Orinda Community Church, 26 Orinda Way [note: this is a new site] Membership is \$25 and new members are welcome. President: Lani Shepp

Projects include:

- The Crossroads Garden at Moraga Way and Brookwood
- Mini garden tours and a major Spring tour

Note: Visit their excellent website,

www.montelindogarden.com, for a list of guest speakers scheduled for the nine monthly meetings.

Orinda Junior Garden Club

First meeting: 9/13. Regular meetings on 2nd Thursdays at 9:30 a.m. Held in members' homes.

Membership is \$125. If interested in joining this 40-member club, contact Laura Sawczuk at 254-9510 to see if you have common interests with the club. Co-Presidents:

Pam Seifert and Diana Treter

Projects include:

- Hanging baskets around the Village
- The Circle at Theatre Square

Orinda Garden Club

Go to www.orindagardenclub.org for information.

Membership is by invitation to this garden club with a 70-year history

President: Gina Fields

Projects include:

- The Triangle across from Orinda Motors
- The Rose Gardens at Heather Farms Park

Read online at:
<http://www.lamorindaweekly.com>
(a pdf reader is required to view the pages)

Got the Bike and the Helmet . . . Now What?

By Christopher Kolm



Chris and friends last Sunday on the Lamorinda Loop, returning from an 80-mile ride
Left to right: Micky Bloom, German Serrano, Bart Borland, Christopher Kolm, Ted Brooks

So you want to ride your bike but don't know where to go? Allow me to introduce you to the Lamorinda Loop. It's safe and can take between one and two hours to ride depending on your speed and how often you stop at any of the great coffee shops along the way.

The key to cycling in suburban areas is to know the secrets that experienced cyclists know. There is an entire network of paths and special streets that link one community to the next and avoid congested roads that are unfriendly to cyclists.

The Lamorinda Loop is about 15 miles long. You can start anywhere along the route but I'll start you out at the corner of Moraga Road and Moraga Way. From this intersection, head out Moraga Way towards Orinda. You will begin to downshift at 1.5 miles from the start; pick a gear you are comfortable with and pace yourself up the 1-mile hill. Watch for broken pavement, debris and overgrown oleander bushes as you crest the hill and roll down through the Glorietta Road intersection.

At about 4.5 miles, you'll approach the Orinda Crossroads; stay right at the light and head towards Theater Square. On the weekend a constant stream of cyclists stop by Starbucks for a quick break; there's lots of room for your bike outside.

Finished that latte? Okay, head across the traffic circle and

turn right onto Davis Road. Go to the first stop sign and look left. This is the hidden entrance of the bicycle path that will connect you to Lafayette.

Follow the bike path, watching for walkers and joggers, kids and dog leashes. The path ends at St. Stephen's Drive. Ride straight across the intersection and down the little hill that looks like it is going to take you onto Highway 24 East. Turn right onto Happy Valley Road and enjoy the long hill down and the smooth pavement. Follow the road to the intersection with Acalanes Road Left on Acalanes Road and onto the marked bike lane. At the light, turn right onto Mt. Diablo Blvd. A short climb uphill earns you a nice coast down in the wide bike lane and past the entrance to Lafayette Reservoir.

At Mountain View Drive the bike lane ends abruptly so watch for traffic, car doors opening and vehicles entering the street. Make your way down the boulevard to Lafayette Circle, turn right and proceed to Fiesta Square.

You've traveled about 9.5 miles now and may need a refresher. Papillion's a great place to take that next break, and again there is plenty of room to store your bike and sit outside. If your bike needs attention or you want to upgrade your outfit, right across the parking lot is the back of Sharp's Cycles, one of only a handful of great bike shops in the

Christopher Kolm is a Moraga dad and a member of the Lamorinda Cycling Club/Synergy Racing Team. We will forward questions or comments to him; just email letter@lamorindaweekly.com.

East Bay.

From Lafayette, there are several options to get back to Moraga but only one route is recommended for the recreational cyclist. Don't go straight up Moraga Road as it is steep and has no shoulder. A less steep but also somewhat dangerous route is to go left on St. Mary's Road but this too has no shoulder at times and cars tend to go faster than the recommended speed limit.

A much better route is to go up Moraga Road to School Street. Left on School Street and about a half mile down past Stanley Middle School is an entrance to the Lafayette-Moraga Bicycle Path. Take a right turn onto the path and discover one of the treasures of living in Lamorinda. It can get a little crowded on the weekends as it is well-used by the young, the old and a vast array of pets and strollers so take your time and enjoy yourself as you make your way slightly uphill on the well-kept trail.

After crossing many small roads, at about 12 miles, the path crosses St. Mary's Road. Motorists are usually friendly here and let you cross. After this intersection, the path cuts through a steep pasture up to your right where cows are often seen grazing. There is a steep bit farther on but it is thankfully short; at the top, the path crosses Rheem Blvd.

Continue slightly uphill past Saint Mary's College on your left and coast down into the Moraga Commons. There are restrooms and water here. You can relax in the park and end your ride now, sitting under a shade tree and appreciating your accomplishment, or take a left at the light onto Moraga Road and cruise back to your starting point at the corner of Moraga Road and Moraga Way.

Some prefer to ride the Loop in the opposite direction; try it both ways and see what suits you!

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