

Los Perales Gains a Library ...but loses a playground

By Lee Borrowman



Los Perales, under construction

Photo Andy Scheck

Excavation began two weeks ago at the site of Los Perales Elementary School's new library. The construction of the library is part of a successful package bid by Rodan Builders. At a cost of 1.1 million dollars, both Los Perales and Camino Pablo will see new facilities. The Los Perales library building will include two student bathrooms, a conference room and offices, and Camino Pablo students will enjoy four new classrooms. The new facilities will include covered walkways.

Los Perales administrators have implemented several measures intended to ensure the safety of students during the construction process, which is scheduled to be completed in February despite the imminent arrival of the rainy season.

As the fencing went up and bulldozers started tearing into the surface of what was formerly known as the Panther B Playground, a couple of civic-minded fourth-graders were circulating a petition amongst the student body requesting that a replacement playground be constructed. The petition echoes the opinion expressed by the Los Perales PTA's Executive Committee in a letter sent to the Superintendent and Governing Board on September 12, stating that although a new library was important for Los Perales, library construction should not

move forward without a playground plan. The Board voted on Sept. 18 to proceed with the construction of the library, but not with plans to build a replacement playground.

Los Perales has been waiting for years for its new library. The project had fallen victim to costly delays and miscommunications. The architect's design included a new playground, which was to be built into a hillside on the south side of the school. When the bids came in at between 2.3 and 2.7 million dollars, everyone balked. The district quickly requested revised bids that excluded the playground, and subsequently accepted the lowest bid. Superintendent Richard Shafer explained, "We just don't have enough money to build a million dollar playground." The price tag of the proposed playground caused some to wonder why the district was unaware that the cost would be so high even though the design had been prepared by the project's architect two years ago.

The PTA is concerned that LP was already far below the other schools in terms of the amount of usable playground space available. Shafer said, "The LP site is one of the most difficult I've ever seen in terms of space. It sits on a hill and is closely surrounded by homes." In its letter, the LP PTA

told the Board, "The goal of upgrading the library is to bring LP up to an equitable position compared to the other Moraga elementary schools, but improving one aspect (library size) by degrading another (playground space) does not accomplish the goal. If construction is begun without a complete plan, it is likely to leave LP in a permanently inequitable position, with a larger library but sub-standard playgrounds and no way to fix the problem."

The minutes of the Sept. 18 Board meeting read, "In as much as construction costs continue to rise, the Board believes that awarding the bids would not preclude a solution for replacing the LP playground space appropriated by the new library."

The Board asked Shafer to convene a committee to "research and recommend alternative sites for improvement of the playground area." The committee, which includes Shafer, LP administrators, teachers, parents and the project architect, will be presenting its recommendations to the Board on Oct. 23.

The financial resource for the current facilities work is the district's \$3 million allocation from the bond fund. It is not known at this time when the Board might vote on an alternative playground plan or how much money might be made available for such a project. Interested parties are encouraged to check the Board's agenda online at <http://www.moraga.k12.ca.us/>.

Wildcats on Stage at Stanley Middle School

(Information submitted by Pam Nichols)

Break out the life preservers! Wildcats on Stage and the Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation proudly present "The Pirate Bride," written and directed by Barrett Lindsay-Steiner. Described by Lindsay-Steiner as "an old fashioned melodrama; The Pirates of Penzance meets Beach Blanket Babylon," Pirate Bride promises to be a rollicking good time!

The performers are 6th,

7th and 8th graders. Some have been involved with Wildcats on Stage since the Fall of 6th grade and plan to continue performing in high school, and others are making their debut. "I love working with LASF and Wildcats on Stage, and really appreciate the hard work these kids are putting into learning their parts with less than forty hours of rehearsal time," said Lindsay-Steiner. The show is suitable for all ages.

Showtimes:
Friday, November 2nd - 6:00 p.m. & a 8:00 p.m.
Saturday, November 3rd - 5:30 p.m. & a 7:30 p.m.
Location:
Stanley Middle School Multi-Use Building
3455 School Street, Lafayette
Tickets:
\$7.00 per person, at the door

Challenge Day Empowers Students at OIS

By Jennifer Wake



OIS eighth graders move chairs in a frenzied activity as a way to get everyone comfortable with each other

Lamorinda schools are well versed in teaching the three "Rs" - reading, writing, and arithmetic - but Orinda Intermediate School (OIS) counselors and administrators believe fourth and fifth "Rs" are equally important: Respect and Responsibility.

As part of OIS's Character Education Program, Associate Principal Jeanne Cusack helped coordinate Challenge Day at the school two weeks ago. The entire eighth grade class of 300 students, along with 75 parents, staff and teachers, participated in a complete day of workshops designed to increase self-esteem, help shift dangerous peer pressure to positive peer support, and reduce the acceptability of teasing, oppression and all forms of violence on campus.

The day started out with fun and engaging activities to establish an environment of comfort and trust, explained Cusack. The eighth graders are placed in groups away from their friends, and away from their comfort zone.

"It started out light, with lots of fun. It was designed to get kids comfortable with each other," Cusack said. "In the activities students had the opportunity to reflect on how they treated each other and how they

have tolerated differences. At the end of the day, they realized that they had the power to make a change."

The Challenge Day program is based on the premise that students should notice what is going on around them, decide the right thing to do, and take action on that decision.

"The Challenge Day leaders referenced 'Notice, Choose, Act' throughout the day," Cusack said. "When kids notice something going on, they need to choose to act. If they see someone being teased, they'll now step in and say 'Hey, that's not cool to be doing that.' It was amazing for us, as adults, to see and hear students express themselves and offer insights about how they treat each other."

In addition to Challenge Day, OIS has implemented several other programs as part of their Character Education Program, including Others First - a program that supports charitable, altruistic, and humanitarian activities by students in the local community.

"If we only focused on academics, I think we'd be missing a big piece of what kids need," Cusack said. "Middle school kids are trying to establish their social status and peer groups. It's important that their

school be an environment where everyone can feel comfortable and safe."

In February 2007, OIS was recognized as a 2007 California School of Character by the Character Education Partnership (CEP) and was one of 25 finalists (from 133 applicants across the United States) for the National Schools of Character award for its comprehensive character education program, which has yielded positive results in student behavior, citizenship, school climate, and academic performance.

Following Challenge Day, 60 OIS eighth grade students signed up to continue the efforts in a secondary program called "Be the Change," which inspires participants to create an environment of compassion, acceptance and respect on campus. Students, staff and teachers met last Thursday to brainstorm things that can be done to promote "Be the Change" around campus and some staff members will attend a training called "The Next Step" to bring back more ideas.

"We have definitely seen our eighth graders embracing the message and being kinder to each other," Cusack said. "The big challenge for us is to perpetuate that feeling."

Lamorinda 4-H Update

Submitted by Sara Captain, Co-President

In this suburban community, the hand-picked opportunity to encounter a real farm is pretty rare. However, the opportunity to spend a whole day on a real farm dallying with unconventional farm activities such as tractor riding, corn mazes, face painting, petting zoos and a homegrown farmer's market is even more uncommon. In fact, such an event occurs only once a year!

Join Lamorinda 4-H and Mangini Farms as they put on the 7th Annual Mangini's Farm Weekend! It's located at 2498 Pleasant Hill Rd, Pleasant Hill, and is open to the public Saturday and Sunday, October 20-21 from 10am-4pm.

For more information, contact Sara Captain at 899-3450

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