

A Wake-Up Call at Joaquin Moraga

By Lee Borrowman

The lessons of a post-Columbine world hit unfortunately close to home in Moraga last week. Joaquin Moraga Middle School Principal Bruce Burns contacted the Moraga Police Department on Friday after confiscating a “hit list” reportedly written by a student that included the names of students and staff members.

In an email to parents, Burns wrote: “I received a telephone call from a concerned parent who told me that his child had heard (about the list) from others. The student gave me the list and told me that he had no intention of harming anyone.” Police officers escorted the student home, and he has been suspended.

Burns continued, “At JM safety is a daily priority. When matters of concern come to our attention we take it very seriously and investigate thoroughly.” Burns conducted a search of the boy’s backpack and school lockers, and the police searched his home. “I want to emphasize that nothing

harmful was discovered in all of these searches,” Burns said.

The Moraga Police subsequently issued a statement confirming that the searches found nothing, and that there is no reason to believe the student presented a risk to either himself or others.

The parents of students whose names were on the list were contacted by the school. We do not have the list, but word of mouth led us to one of these parents, a mother who said, “I respect and appreciate the job that school officials did, on the minute chance that this was indeed something serious. My own child never felt threatened. We, as a family, are holding (the boy’s) family in our good thoughts and hope that everything works out well for everyone. I’m so glad that we live in a community in which people and schools care.”

The mother of another JM student said, “My daughter feels that this list was created out of sadness, and that (the boy) would never cause

harm to anyone. My son, a sophomore in high school, says many boys keep similar lists of people they feel have wronged them; it’s not uncommon at all.”

Not all of the facts have come to light, particularly around the boy’s motivation for making the ill-advised list, but although he clearly condemns the boy’s behavior, Burns’ email concluded with a hint that this child may himself have had trouble with bullies:

“It is important that we learn from this experience. Threats will be investigated and will not be tolerated. We also need to reflect on what each of us can do to make JM a positive environment that is free from intimidation and bullying, indifference and isolation, and intolerance. Every student and parent has the right to expect that students will learn in a safe and non-violent school environment.”