

## The Future of the Hacienda Still Uncertain

By Sophie Braccini



**T**he Hacienda De Las Flores is Moraga's most picturesque public building. A popular place for weddings, it also houses classes organized by the Parks and Recreation Department and group meetings. Until recently, most of Town's staff had their offices there. But the building is old, it needs repair and refurbishing, and carries an operational deficit of a quarter of a million dollars per year. The task at hand is dual: raise revenue for better balancing the budget and find capital for repairs and restoration.

The Town Council appointed a Hacienda Committee in 2005 to propose solutions. On February 27th, that Committee presented its report to the Council, along with a consultant who worked on a business plan to develop the Hacienda's revenue. During its operations, the Committee had recommended the creation of a Foundation to raise some of the \$1.2 million that is needed to repair the Hacienda.

The Foundation is now incorporated and has begun its fundraising efforts. Margaret DePriester, who is a member of the Committee and the Foundation, addressed the Council: "We need more guidance from the Town," she said. "We recommend a general survey of the population to understand what the people want from this building. Some of our residents don't even know it exists."

Councilmember Mike Metcalf wondered if a survey was a good idea at this time. "We've had enough surveys in this town," he said, in his usual direct style, "What we need is a clear vision and mission statement for the next ten years." As the members of the Committee asked for a Councilmember to volunteer to be their liaison, Metcalf walked the talk and stepped forward.

A representative from consultants Moore Iacofano Goltsman presented a three-step business plan to increase the Hacienda's revenue. Step 1: Minimal Physical Change, this step emphasizes changes in marketing efforts and promotes the idea of two weddings a day. Step 2: Minor Site and Building Improvements, this step adds a small amount of additional meeting space in the La Sala Building. Step 3: Major Building Improvements, the addition of approximately 5,000 square feet of indoor space for medium-sized group gatherings. This facility would provide the needed space to accommodate indoor events throughout the year. The 5,000 square foot building would replace the Casita.

All members of the Council approved Step 1, but 2 and especially 3 raised many eyebrows. "We have too many balls in the air," said Metcalf, "it is not prudent management to invest before we have a vision for the Hacienda."

Mayor Deschambault added two more layers of concern: "We have a serious problem of parking at the Hacienda," she commented, "and we have not discussed as a community where we want a Community Center to be." Council member Bird agreed, "We have to answer first what the Town wants." Steps 2 and 3 were not approved.

Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram plays key role as revenue provider for the Hacienda. "Mike (Metcalf) being the liaison is a great positive step," commented the Director. As far as increasing the revenue, he is confident: "I think we need to program this place like a real Community Center. We will prove to the Town and the Council that we can reduce the deficit. It will take two years, but we will do it."