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Public Works team: (from left to right) first row: Charles (Dana) Blatner and Jill Mercurio, second row: Jose Limon, John Sherbert, Dan Bernie, Steve Reichhold, Kyle Salvin and Ruben Ochoa. Celina Carolipio not on picture Photo Sophie Braccini

Dan Bernie, Taking Care of Moraga

By Sophie Braccini

Dan Bernie is this kind of tough man that you want to count among your friends when trouble hits. The ex-Marine is reliable, resourceful; he knows how to lead and organize and has a passion for his work in Moraga, where he is the superintendent of parks and public works. Most of all, Bernie is humble, he even refused to have his picture taken unless his whole team was there.

The Campo graduate joined the Marines at age seventeen. He joined the Moraga staff in 1979 and was promoted to Supervisor in 1982. He cares for 440 acres of parks and open land, 55 miles of roads, public buildings including the Hacienda and the library and for cleanliness of the water going into the creeks.

Bernie maintains the whole town with a staff of five, including himself. "This is probably the smallest team for a comparably-sized town in California," says Bernie, "but I understand that we have budget challenges and we've had to be creative."

In 1980, Bernie contacted Lieutenant Priebe, of the Moraga Police, to propose that juvenile offenders from Lamorinda work for the Town to offset minor offenses. The system worked well until Bernie's responsibilities increased and he needed more manpower. Now he works with the "Work Alternative Program."

The workers serving in Moraga are sent by the Walnut Creek Court and have been condemned for minor offences such as DUI. They labor for a 25 cents an hour, for a day or as long as six months. "Most of the time we receive an average of two or three workers per day," explains Bernie, "we usually ask them to pick up trash along the road, weed our parks, dig ditches, paint, etc... Basically, anything that can be done without using electric tools."

And there is a lot of weeding to do in Moraga. The town is the leader in Integrated Pest Management (I.P.M.) in Contra Costa. "We do not use any type of chemicals anymore in our parks, including the Hacienda," beams Bernie. Children can roll in the grass; families can pic-

nic in the parks with a total peace of mind. This is very demanding in terms of manpower, since all weeding is done manually, so the continuation of the Work Alternative program is the key to maintaining the program.

Bernie stressed that the support of the Town Council, which unanimously approved the IPM policy in September of 2006. Bernie believes that this kind of non-toxic treatment is the way of the future, "I wouldn't want to put anybody in harm's way," says the ex-Marine.

To keep our parks clean, Bernie took another original and humanitarian initiative. He hired "Future Explorers," a group that gives work to mentally disabled workers under strict supervision. "They do a fantastic job for about \$19,000 a year," explains Bernie. "I just have to explain what I expect to the supervisor and the workers take great pride in their work."

Bernie also has responsibility for the quality of water that goes down our drains and into our creeks. "Changing behaviors takes time and our effort is placed on education," said Bernie. Developers, both large and small, need to learn ways to ensure that no spillage from construction will reach the reservoirs, gardeners need to be taught not to blow dead leaves into storm drains, and residents need to learn to wash cars on their lawns.

For the years to come, Bernie's biggest concern is to keep good staff. "PG&E and EBMUD love to get people coming from our department, they are well trained and are not afraid to work." Then of course roads are high on his list, even if his boss, Public Works Director and Town Engineer Jill Mercurio, is big on preventative actions that will save the Town money down the road. "We are lucky to have such quality people working for Moraga," concludes Bernie, "from the Town Manager who is an expert at selecting the best department heads since I've been here, to our Director Jill Mercurio who has brought the Department to an all new level, the residents are in good hands."