

Hacienda Foundation Seeks Input

By Sophie Braccini



Hacienda Grounds

Photo Dianna Evans

A year ago, the Town of Moraga decided to form a Foundation to help revive the Hacienda de las Flores. The beautiful mansion that was once the home of the Rheem family was bought by the town in 1973 and became one of its public facilities.

Weddings, community classes, meetings and events are held at the Hacienda. Some of the Town offices are still housed there, but more should move to the facility at 329 Rheem before the end of the year. The building is aging; it needs updates.

“The jewel of Moraga” needs to find new sources of income and better serve the community that supports it. The under-utilize facility is going to lose revenue when the remaining town offices are moved, and even doubling the number of weddings will not balance the budget. As of today, the Hacienda costs the Town about \$345,000 a year.

The task of the Foundation is vast. As part of its planning process, the Foundation has decided to poll the community. “Form will follow function,” declares Judy Dinkle, who serves as the Chair of the Foundation, “only when we know what the community wants, will we start our fund raising effort.” The Foundation members developed a questionnaire that they’ve been distributing to all of the organizations in town.

Some Moraga residents are not even aware of the existence of the Hacienda. The beautiful facility encompasses three historical buildings surrounded by a very large park that’s open to the public. The Cindy Waxman Nature Trail is maintained on the premises, benches and restrooms are available.

Jay Ingram the Parks and Recreation Director is increasing the offering of classes. “We must boost the enrichment activities at the Hacienda. People are not accustomed to coming here for Parks and Recreation related programs/activities,” says Ingram, “It is going to take time and education in order for people to realize they no longer have to go to Lafayette or Orinda to participate in recreational activities. It is going to take a culture change.”

There are some roadblocks on the way to developing the Hacienda.

One is the limited amount of parking spaces available. “One solution would be to move the corporate yard that harbors public vehicles,” says Dinkle, “moving the yard would allow access through Moraga Road and would create additional parking spaces.”

Another challenge of the building itself is its energy inefficiency. “The roof, foundation, electrical and piping systems are okay,” explains Dinkle, “but the buildings are not energy efficient and this means very high operating costs.” The inside configuration of the rooms are not optimal either. This was a family estate and the accommodations are not adequate for hosting very large crowds. As a result, the facility is used only for outside weddings.

Margaret DePriester, a former Mayor of Moraga and now a member of the Foundation, believes in the promise of the Hacienda: “We have to keep it as one of Moraga’s historic treasures. This place is one of the few reminders of our past. I hope it could become a real community center.”

The more responses the Foundation receives, the more political clout it will wield. To participate, you can request the questionnaire by sending an email to: feedback@haciendafoundation.org.

You can also send your responses to the following questions via email:

When were you last at the Hacienda and why did you go? What do you like best and least about the Hacienda? Do you think the Hacienda should be fixed up for the future and if yes what would you like to see it used for? Possibilities: a park, a community center for recreation and education, a Teen center, a Senior center, a rental facility for parties, weddings, meetings, a place for quiet reflection; any other ideas?

What needs to be done to make sure the Hacienda is ready to serve the citizens of Moraga? The Foundation would like to know where residents think the Town resources should be spent: Roads? The Hacienda? Sports fields? Gymnasium? Other? Finally, you should indicate your age group, family size and optionally your name and contact information if you’d like to support the restoration project.

On June 25th, Jay Ingram will present the Foundation’s update to the Town Council. The Hacienda de las Flores is located off Moraga Rd, at 2100 Donald Drive.