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Life in LAMORINDA

Flagmen Keep Cars Rolling Through Record Heat

By Jennifer Wake



Mountain Cascade flagmen directing traffic in 104 degree heat

Photo Jennifer Wake

When temperatures reach triple digits, most of us run to the sanctity of our air conditioned homes or offices. But when your office is the hard pavement of a busy street and your uniform is heavy boots, a hard hat, reflector vest and a stop sign, there is no escape.

The Mountain Cascade flagmen who have been keeping cars moving on the detour routes along St. Mary's Road and Moraga Road during the Moraga Road Pipeline Construction Project have one of the hardest jobs, says Mountain Cascade project manager Tony Batista. On a typical day, paving materials can reach 150 degrees, according to a report on urban heat islands by the Environmental Protection Agency. The excess heat radiates away from the ground, adding to the stifling heat of the

summer sun. And the recent poor air quality only makes things worse.

"People think that flagging is an easy job," Batista says, "but it's one of the tougher jobs out there."

In addition to braving the elements, flaggers must endure their eight hour shift by themselves, while staying alert to any traffic problems, keeping buses on schedule, and staying courteous to passing motorists. "People flagging get all the grief, obscene gestures and comments," says Mountain Cascade Project Coordinator John Eudy. "If a bus is behind a couple of cars, they flag the cars through to keep the bus on schedule. Everyone is 'flagmen certified' to keep things running smoothly and to avoid accidents."

Fortunately, Batista says

most people (about 98 percent) have been cordial. But a choice few have tried to get past the system, and have even put flagmen in danger.

Some motorists have ignored the road closure signs, continuing along Moraga Road until they are finally re-diverted back to the detour route. One driver reportedly swerved at a flagger a couple of weeks ago. "They're probably teenage kids messing around having fun, but they could accidentally hit the gas or the brake and you have a guy hurt or killed because someone wanted a laugh," Eudy says.

All flagmen have business cards they hand to disgruntled motorists with contact numbers to lodge complaints to EBMUD Community Affairs Representative Nora Harlow. "Nora has received some complaints and

some suggestions, but a lot of phone calls and emails complimenting the flaggers and thanking them for their hard work," Eudy says. "She drives the route regularly to see if there are any problems. There haven't been any accidents, thank God. All the residents and locals are getting used to it. When I was at a recent family function, I was told that it's easier to get down some roads because they're flagging traffic smoothly through without stopping."

Keeping things running smoothly, however, is a lonely job. One Mountain Cascade worker said two friends (one a flagman) were carpooling; because he hadn't talked to anyone all day, the flagman talked non-stop to his friend the entire way home. Although Dave Papst, the Flagger Foreman, rotates the flagmen, makes sure they get the breaks they need and time to sit down, and is taking extended measures to keep his men hydrated, it doesn't make it easy.

There are no iPods, there is no chit-chat by a water cooler. There's just the hum of cars passing by and an occasional wave of a friendly hand – or a less than friendly finger.

"I wouldn't want to be standing on my feet all day in the hot sun," Eudy says. "Slow down, take it slow. The flagmen are working out there to make all the residents' drives smoother. Be courteous. Be patient. You'll get to work on time. One minute longer is not going to hurt you."



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Management Changes Tune for 24-Hour Members

By Cathy Tyson



Members entering the new Moraga 24-Hour Fitness location Photo Cathy Tyson

It was all smiles and shiny new exercise machines at the opening of the new Super Sport 24-Hour Fitness facility in Moraga on Friday. The new club is a huge improvement over the old facility, spacious, airy, with

upscale finishes, a sea of exercise equipment, a dedicated spinning room with 34 bicycles, and an expansive locker room with granite countertops.

The good news inside belies the recent flurry of complaints from angry members who were upset about paying additional fees that they thought were unwarranted. In a June letter, members were informed that everyone who would like to use the new facility would have to pay an additional fee.


Apparently all of the member complaints have had some impact on management. There's been a shift to now honor memberships initiated after August of 2007; they can use the new club without any additional fees. According to a

company spokesperson, "One-Club" members who signed up from August 25, 2007 forward will be transferred as a "One-Club" member to the new Moraga location. A similar arrangement is in place for those that signed an "All-Club Sport" members will be upgraded to "All-Club Super Sport" and will have access to the new club, free of additional fees as well as all Super Sport, Sport and Active 24-Hour locations.

A company spokesperson spelled out the policy change: "24-Hour Fitness values the feedback we have received from our members and we have taken steps to communicate with them about our new club opening in Moraga. We have informed members who joined our club starting in late August 2007 that they will have full access to the new facility without any increase in their monthly dues. Members who signed up prior to this date can enjoy our new facility for either an additional \$9.99 per month or no more than a total of \$39.99 per month, whichever amount is less for their particular membership. The majority of these members will pay much less than \$39.99 per month under this arrangement. These members also will have free access to the new club for 30 days before deciding whether to upgrade their membership."

Perhaps the letter from attorney Victoria Smith, who is also the Mayor of Orinda and a disgruntled 24-Hour Fitness member, had some impact:

... continued on page 17



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