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## Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board-Incumbents Face Firefighters

By Andrea A. Firth

Two-fifths of Moraga and Orinda residents will be voting for their candidate for Director of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board on November 4th. The races for Director of MOFD Divisions 2 and 5 are both contested, and in both races the incumbents are running against residents who are or were firefighters.

How was the MOFD formed, what are the Divisions, and who votes?

Moraga and Orinda combined to form one fire district eleven years ago.

Duplicative positions were eliminated and services were streamlined. The merger enabled the District to replace obsolete equipment; broaden employee training and education opportunities, which have resulted in a doubling of the number of well-versed rescue responders; and provide paramedic coverage on every engine that goes out on a call.

With the formation of the District, a five member Board was established to set policy and provide financial oversight. The Fire District was divided into five geographical divisions with a Director, who must live within the Division, assigned to each. For Division 2 (Rheem Valley area in Moraga)-the candidates are Bob Nelson and Fred Weil. For Division 5 (north Orinda)-the candidates are Gene Gottfried and Brook Mancinelli. Only residents living within the boundaries of Divisions 2 and 5 will vote for a Director in the upcoming election. MOFD Board terms are for four years.

The Lamorinda Weekly asked each candidate for the MOFD Board to identify the most critical issues facing the Fire District in the next four years and to describe his approach to managing these issues if elected.

### MOFD Division 2, Rheem Valley Area

Bob Nelson

A retired firefighter with 30 years of continuous service, Nelson started his career with the San Pablo Fire Service. He transferred to the Orinda Fire Protection District after eight years. He was quickly promoted to Captain and served the remainder of his career with the District. Nelson achieved an AA Degree in Fire Science and was one of the first fire fighters in Contra Costa County certified as an Emergency Medical Technician.

Nelson's response: Currently the MOFD is facing a budget deficit of \$800,000.00 for the year of 2008/2009. This will be the first time that either Fire District has faced a budget deficit prior to their merger and/or after their merger. My plan would be to find how and why this deficit materialized. Then we would have to inaugurate a plan to curtail this problem. The days of doing business as usual has to be reigned in and cuts in programs have to be instituted and people held accountable for their particular programs. I would find it prudent to ask the rank and file employees for their ideas to help formulate this plan of action.

Fred Weil

Incumbent Weil has served on the Fire District Board since 2003 and is currently the Board president. A community volunteer for over 35 years, he has served on both the Moraga School District and Acalanes Union School District Governing Boards and the Campolindo Homeowners' Association Board. He was a founder of the Moraga Educational Foundation. Weil has worked as a tax and

corporate attorney for 39 years.

Weill's response: The Fire District's challenges over the next four years are to (1) Maintain high quality service despite stagnant property tax revenues, recent stock market losses that will impact our pension costs, and impending population growth; and (2) Control pension and post-retirement health costs while maintaining fair and competitive employee compensation. If re-elected, I will work to maintain tight budget controls. Require developers to pay for additional capital, operating and other costs required for their developments. Existing fire and rescue services must not be degraded by new developments. Move the administration of our District's pension plan from the County retirement system to the better-managed, State-run CalPERS system. And, explore ways to control future post-retirement health care costs without degrading retiree medical coverage.

**MOFD Division 5,  
North Orinda**

Eugene L. Gottfried, M.D.

Incumbent Gottfried has served as a Director since 2002 and Board President in 2003-2004. He was named Volunteer of the Year in 2007. He is the Director of the Rescue One Foundation, a member of the Orinda Public Safety Advisory Commission, and a Community Emergency Response Team Instructor. Following a career in academic medicine, Gottfried maintains an appointment as Professor Emeritus at UCSF.

Gottfried's response: MOFD has achieved many of its original goals- paramedics on every ambulance and engine, upgraded apparatus and equipment, replacement of two obsolete fire stations, and full-time ambulance crews in downtown Orinda. Some critical problems remain, however. The cost of retiree benefits continues to rise. Two fire stations require seismic upgrades to protect personnel and equipment. A proposed multimillion-dollar regional communications system may render our existing radios obsolete. New residential developments will require expanded service. We will have to make some difficult decisions to establish priorities, seek cost-effective solutions, and stay within our allocated budget.

Brook Mancinelli

A native of Orinda and a Miramonte graduate, Mancinelli has been a firefighter for almost fourteen years. He was a firefighter with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District before transferring to work in San Francisco. Mancinelli has served in some of the busiest fire stations in the nation as a firefighter/paramedic and as a member of Hazardous Materials teams, Technical Rescue teams, and wild land fire response crews.

Mancinelli's response: As a candidate I feel one of the most critical issues facing our fire district is ensuring that we maintain a fiscal balance, safeguarding the long-term financial health of the district, while protecting the ability of our firefighters to respond to emergencies. Managing these issues includes controlling pension and healthcare costs, while maintaining competitive working conditions to limit attrition and preserve experience within the district. Fire stations 41 on Moraga Way and 43 on Charles Hill Road are in need of seismic retrofit to protect the response capabilities in those neighborhoods in the event of a major earthquake.

**MOFD Division 5, North Orinda**

Division 5 covers all of Orinda north of Highway 24, from Tilden Park to Charles Hill Roads and from Altarinda and El Nido Ranch Road to Bear Creek Road.

**MOFD Division 2,  
Rheem Valley, Moraga**

Division 2 consists of a portion of Moraga starting at the Lafayette border on the North, and continuing South and East to St. Mary's Road and West to the Orinda border and Camino Ricardo. The area includes Campolindo, Countrystone, Rheem Valley Manor, Moraga Place, Moraga Road, Rheem Valley Boulevard and its feeder streets, Ascot Drive, Donald Drive and the area around Los Perales School, including Corliss, Crossbrook, Camino Ricardo (North of Corliss) and Greenfield Drive, and feeder streets North of Corliss.

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