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One Building Better Than Two

By Cathy Tyson



Veteran's Memorial Building on Mt. Diablo Boulevard Photo provided

In a coordinated effort, the powers that be traded two crumbling Veterans Memorial Buildings for one state of the art facility. Three years on, users can see that it was a good deal for all involved.

It took a number of entities to make the swap happen: Walnut Creek and Lafayette Redevelopment Agencies, Contra Costa County and Veterans groups from both Walnut Creek and Lafayette.

The original Walnut Creek Veterans Memorial Building (VMB), located on what is now Mt. Diablo Boulevard was dedicated in 1925. After World War II, the existing building was relocated to Locust Street, where a new lower floor was constructed and the original building placed on top. This remodeled facility, completed in 1948, had a sagging beam that held up the roof and was in danger of failing, sending the air conditioning unit into the upstairs ballroom.

The original Lafayette VMB was built in 1939 as a Works Progress Administration project and had definitely seen better days, too. Contra Costa County owned both aging buildings and due to budget constraints, was barely able to do the minimum amount of repair to keep the doors open. Updating the buildings was not an option.

Now located at the corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Risa Road, the new 9,500 square foot award-winning building serves both Lafayette and Walnut Creek Veterans, has large meeting spaces that can accommodate over 500 people, a bar

area, a modern kitchen, attractive spacious bathrooms and plenty of parking.

"Vets use the building, probably 20% - 25% of the time," said John Wintersteen in a recent interview. The American Legion, the Marine Corps League, the VFW and Military Officers Association of America all hold approximately one dinner and one Board meeting there per month. The rest of the time the building is rented out for a variety of functions.

In addition, the Veterans Memorial Building is where Project Marine Care packages are assembled and sent out to personnel serving overseas, year round. To date, over 51,000 pounds of food, personal items, books and magazines have been sent.

Although Contra Costa County owns the building, Veterans lease it, and are responsible for booking events, maintenance and daily operations. Wintersteen estimates it costs approximately \$20,000 per month for insurance, staffing, utilities and more.

Because the Lafayette War Veterans, Inc. is a non-profit group, proceeds above operating costs are assigned to a Capital Improvement Fund. Each of the Member Veterans Service Organizations sponsor their own projects, from supporting Scouting organizations to raising money to help veterans in various ways.

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