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# Life in LAMORINDA

## Freecycle, a Sustainable Way to Pass Along The Goods

By Sophie Braccini



Craig Isaacs with his Freecycle barbecue. Picture courtesy of the Isaacs family

Becoming a member of Freecycle is easy; so is using it, and you don't have to own a bicycle. Freecycle stands for free recycling - all you need is anything cluttering

up your home that would be better off with someone who might be able to put it to good use.

"I wanted to find a way to get rid of things, but be sure that it could be re-used by someone who would really appreciate it," says Erin Hull, a Lafayette mom who's been using the free service for a year, "finding a local group where people offer and/or grab stuff for re-using them was just perfect."

The Lamorinda group of free recyclers is a spin-off of the original association that was founded 5 1/2 years ago in Arizona by Deron Beal. At the time, he was working with a small non-profit organization, RISE, which provides recycling services to businesses. He watched perfectly reusable items being thrown away and looked for a way for non-profits to get access to it for free. Beal sent out the first e-mail announcing the Freecycle Network™ to 30 or 40 friends and a handful of nonprofits in Tucson, Arizona. "As a result, we are currently keeping over 500 tons a day out of landfills," he says on his website, "this amounts to five times the height of Mt. Everest in the past year alone, when stacked in garbage trucks." The original cause of helping non-profits get what they need for free is still one of the main uses of the service.

The motivation is the same for

the owner/moderator of the Lamorinda group, Ken Dreyfuss. The goal of Lamorinda Freecycle is to reduce waste in Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda by connecting individuals who are throwing away goods with others who are seeking them. "A lot of non-profit groups are accessing our site," says Dreyfuss, "teachers, schools, and even a cat group, among others, are getting some of what they need on Freecycle."

Craig Isaacs of Lafayette, who has been using the group for years, agrees, "I've seen a lot of non-profits on the site, school teachers who need stuff for their class, boxes of crayons, scissors," he said, "and once I happened to have many of them; it's a great system." Isaacs remembers giving a dog kennel to the SPCA, and many other things to individuals as well. "I've given away a computer hard drive, Mac books, I gave away a video player, a basket ball hoop, things we don't need anymore and someone else could. This is a break in the buying cycle we are caught in." Isaacs has also acquired items on Freecycle, "the favorite thing I got is a barbecue, and it's the best barbecue!" he says.

To make sure that the network runs smoothly and commercial free as it grows, the role of the moderator is key. "I check the messages daily," says Dreyfuss, "I try to control the

content, and accept new members." Dreyfuss says he does not have to intervene very often. "Sometimes I have to remove messages that propose the reselling of things, which is not the purpose of the group," he notes, "no money is ever involved." The moderator can delete messages, and ban a person from the group; Dreyfuss remembers having done this only three times in five years.

Hull continues to use the service with a sense of usefulness, "I gave a full box of play-dough tools for toddlers to someone who needed it for her nephew," she says, "it is very useful for artists as well, who need things that I would see as garbage, like broken tiles, for someone's garbage is someone else's art."

Some of Hull's friends told her that they were a bit wary of leaving things on their porches; Hull herself has sometimes delivered or agreed on a pick-up place. Isaacs has people come to the site of his Lafayette business. "Check the safety tips and rules that are posted on the web site," says Isaacs, adding that he never heard of any issue arising from his network. For more information, go to the web site: freecycle.org, and the Lamorinda group: //groups.yahoo.com/group/LMFN-Lafayette-Moraga-Orinda/.

### More Free Recycling in Moraga

Beverly Harper, a Moraga mother of three boys ages 3, 5, and 7, organized a different sort of free recycling event last month. "I've been focusing on ways to help out people in our community with this whole financial crisis that we're in right now," said Harper, "I decided that it was getting ridiculous for all of us to be spending money on great quality kids' apparel when putting groceries on the table and paying the mortgage should be our priorities."

Clothes that are outgrown in what seems like weeks, shoes worn once and cast aside, ski wear that sees snow a few times and then ends up in the Goodwill bag could be recycled right here where friends and neighbors can re-use it.

Harper contacted several friends and local organizations such as the Moraga Junior Women's Club, Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church's (MVPC) Mom's Council and the Lamorinda Mom's Club and asked them pull out their gently used kids' clothing items and bring them to MVPC, which donated space and tables for the event.

Harper estimates that 40 to 50 families came through and almost everything was gone by the end of the morning. There was a large amount of small clothing, from newborn to toddler, but there were also some great items in larger sizes including cleats and ski wear for young teens. "There was no need to bring something in order to take something," said Harper, "but I definitely encouraged people to partake, reminding them that this was set up to benefit all of us."

Harper is planning another event on March 12 from 9:00am-noon at MVPC. She is not opposed to people outside of the community participating, but she doesn't do any official advertising, just email and word of mouth. Harper can be reached at bali42@yahoo.com.

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If you are 50 to 88 years of age and have a diagnosis of probable Alzheimer's disease, you may be eligible to participate in the ICARA study.

## Moraga, Orinda, and MOFD Meet

... continued from page 1

Approximately 30 individuals and a group of ten firefighters attended the meeting. Orinda residents, many of whom commended the three agencies for meeting and initiating a public dialogue, dominated the public comment segment of the meeting. Several members of the RETF strongly encouraged the Council Members to employ an independent consultant to investigate the matter. And a couple of Orindans advocated that City secede from MOFD and form an independent fire district.

Following the public comment, Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter, who chaired the meeting, moved the group quickly through the agenda infusing an occasional humorous quip, which helped to alleviate some of the tension in the room. All eyes were focused on Chief Nowicki as he reviewed the definition and utilization of the fire flow tax, provided a historical perspective of the District's formation, and described the distribution of emergency and fire protection services in detail. Along the way Nowicki responded to a number of questions posed by the Council Members on a variety of issues related to the Fire District.

**Response Zones.** There are two fire stations in Moraga and three located in Orinda. "The apparatus [stationed in] Orinda respond predominantly to households in Orinda. The fire engines and emergency vehicles stationed in Moraga also cover many homes in Orinda," stated Nowicki. "It's important to remember that stations are responsible for covering a 1.5 miles radius around the station," he added. This leads to 20% to 25 % of the Moraga stations providing coverage in Orinda explained Nowicki.

When asked if Orinda could contact with Moraga to obtain that "25% coverage," Nowicki replied, "That just makes bad bed fellows. It's not good business." He expanded on this comment noting that surrounding districts routinely provide coverage through a reciprocal agreement. "We responded into Lafayette 98 times last year. We know we need to back them up," he stated. In return, Lafayette regularly responds to calls that emanate from Saint Mary's College in Moraga.

**Fire Flow Tax.** Moraga and Orinda merged to form one fire district almost 12 years ago. At that time, Moraga had a fire flow tax in place and Orindans voted to establish this special tax to assist with providing funds for fire protection and emergency service equipment and water distribution facilities. The tax is applied by parcel and calculated by multiplying the tax rate (currently 6 cents per parcel)—established annually by the Fire District Board—by a fire risk flow factor (based on factors such as square footage and the inclusion of a sprinkler system). The average Orinda/Moraga home carries a fire flow tax of about \$80 to \$100 per year.

**Water Pipes.** An element of Orinda's infrastructure problem is the status of the City's water pipes that are old, small in size, and often corroded further narrowing the water flow. It is EBMUD's responsibility to repair broken water lines at which time pipes are upgraded to the more optimal unobstructed six-inch pipe. However, the party responsible to replace the many old and intact water pipes that deliver suboptimal amounts of water and pressure is less clear. Nowicki explained that the fire flow tax is not specific to addressing water flow

and water pipe systems, and the Board's policy has been to apply the tax dollars to equipment and facilities and not personnel. "We feel that the MOFD should be a part of getting the water pipes upgraded, but we will not be able to address this issue for half a decade," stated MOFD Board Member John Wyro.

**High Severity and Unincorporated Areas.** There is a larger amount of high fire hazard severity area in Orinda as compared to Moraga, according to Nowicki. These areas require wild land apparatus and training. Nowicki also augments staffing capabilities at high-risk times in these high-severity zones. The Chief also described the District's boundaries, which include Canyon and unincorporated parts of Moraga.

**Other Differences.** Nowicki explained that when the MOFD was formed, Orinda had significant infrastructure needs. There were no paramedic resources, two stations needed to be razed and rebuilt, the equipment was old, and training was needed. "Almost all of the infrastructure needs have been met in Orinda," stated Nowicki, noting that it has taken time to make up the inequities that were inherited with the merger. He also stated that it is easier for the Fire District to respond in Moraga due to the wider and newer roads, and that Orinda placed more calls for emergency and fire service than Moraga. Nowicki reiterated that the MOFD responds to the needs of Orinda and Moraga as a single and unified District.

The Tri-Agency Committee will meet again on Thursday, March 26th at 7 p.m. in the Orinda Library Auditorium to continue their discussions.

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