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Classic Americana: Reenactment of 50-year Old Prank

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Joe and Virginia Munroe

Photo Doug Kohen

While finding participants was easy, locating a phone booth was another issue; gone the way of manual typewriters, roll-up car windows, vinyl records and black and white television. However, Lisa Moore '96, Assistant Vice President of Development, came to the rescue by contacting regent Michael Zumbo '82 president of Jaroth Inc., a communications firm, who donated a booth, sent up from L.A.

The booth will have a permanent home with other SMC memorabilia in the Visitors Center when it is completed. Though the booth will not be operable, it will engender memories of other times when breaking Guinness World

Book records—like stuffing phone booths and Volkswagens and swallowing goldfish—were innocuous



Photo Doug Kohen

and wholesome pastimes.

Following a barbecue, the event began to accelerate with eager students intent on breaking the 1959 record. The students were divided into teams, *Habitat for Humanity*—wearing black t-shirts imprinted with the phone booth picture—and the *Sculptures*, wearing thin, white coveralls.

Following an introduction by president, Brother Ron Gallagher, the challenge began. Though short on technique, the adrenaline was not. Overcome by the excitement of it all, people crowded around the booth with vocal support and a helpful push here and there. Most others could only guess what might be happening in the human vortex and simply enjoyed a whiff of another time—more innocent and perhaps simpler—where phone calls were made in a booth or on a rotary phone. In the end, no records were broken or set but the smiles and linkage through time were enough.

Morinda and MOFD Meet

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Nowicki's report to the committee covered the Fire District's past capital expenditures, operational comparisons between Moraga and Orinda, and the MOFD's long-range financial forecast. At the time of the merger, The Orinda Fire District was in less than optimal condition according to Nowicki. Capital expenditures spent renovating infrastructure since the District was formed has been heavily weighted to Orinda with almost \$2,975,000 spent on equipment and facilities in Orinda over the past 11 years as compared to \$264,500 allocated to Moraga. [Similar upgrades occurring in both Orinda and Moraga, such as a new fire station in each jurisdiction, were zeroed out.] "Currently our apparatus status is stellar. We are going to be good [with respect to apparatus] for a long time," stated Nowicki.

Several analyses of the distribution of the MOFD's operational costs across Moraga and Orinda were provided to the Committee to address the RETF's question regarding the appropriateness of the property tax allocation between the two municipalities. Nowicki presented a variety of measures including parcels served, daily responders, red flag staffing, unfunded liabilities, number of fire stations, and weed abatement needs that supported the MOFD's contention that the current property tax allocation is correct. How best to measure adequate fire and emergency medical service was debated. Nowicki focused on response time, which he characterized as optimal at four to six minutes or

less, noting that the driving distance in an urban area from the station to the call should be within 1.5 miles.

When the discussion moved to the MOFD's long-range financial forecast, Nowicki stated, "You are never going to find a District as transparent as the MOFD." He projected that MOFD's revenues over the next year would be impacted by a delay in homebuilding in the Wilder development and that the primary spending concerns were the need for seismic retrofits and ADA upgrades at two stations. Nowicki also stated the District needed a fully operational training facility that was not included in the budget projections.

Orinda Council Member Steve Glazer highlighted the facts that there have been significant changes to the financial landscape since the RETF had prepared their initial report and that additional data regarding the MOFD's financial picture were now available. He asked Nowicki how the RETF's original proposal to cap the District's property tax revenues at 4.5% would impact service. "Obviously we would not be able to sustain the tempo and quality of our service with a 4.5% cap," responded Nowicki.

Glazer also pointed out some of the moving parts in the financial forecast which included declining property tax revenues and the negative impact of a projected 30% decrease in investment return for 2008 on the MOFD's significant pension obligations. The unfunded liability costs of post employment benefits such as healthcare were also dis-

cussed. Although these benefits do not have to be funded fully every year, MOFD Director Fred Weil identified the challenge of addressing the post retirement health care costs. "We can delay expenses, but we can not replace them," stated Weil.

Public comments during the meeting by Clyde Vaughn, Steve Cohn, and Martin Resch expressed dissatisfaction with District's personnel costs, the proportionality of the MOFD costs between Moraga and Orinda, and the construct of the Excel spreadsheet supporting the forecast.

Chief Nowicki also presented the Committee with a summary of the MOFD's response to the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) Municipal Service Review (MSR)—an eighteen-page, single-spaced response in which the MOFD identified a number of inaccuracies and problematic methodologies. Nowicki identified three overarching problems in the MSR: the use of per capita costs versus response time to determine cost effectiveness; the classification of the MOFD as an urban district versus a suburban and rural district; and the characterization of the District as inefficient based upon inappropriate comparisons to other dissimilar Districts. Nowicki also found the MSR's proposal for the Orinda to potentially leave the MOFD very problematic. MOFD Director John Wyro agreed. "That recommendation came out of the blue without any supporting evidence to validate the recommendation," stated Wyro.

Orinda in Action—April 18th

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The Orinda Chamber of Commerce will be collecting electronic waste recycling and used batteries; they will be based in the BART parking lot. Goodwill will collect reusable clothing and household goods and the Contra Costa Food Bank will accept donations of non-perishable

food items; both of these activities will be based in the parking lot of 25 Orinda Way.

And if you can't make it on the 18th, there is still a way to participate. "Residents have always had the ability to donate to the City through the Orinda Community Improvement Fund," ex-

plains Severson. Monies from this fund helped to pay for Orinda's police dog, Shepp. Contributions to the Improvement Fund can be applied to offset costs of the clean up day such as plants. Donation forms are available at the City website (www.cityoforinda.org).

You're Invited To Take a Photo* with the Easter Bunny So Bring Your Camera!

When you're the photographer...you get the shot you want!!

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