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Lamorinda's Religious Services



CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH
24 Orinda Way, Orinda (next to the Library) - 254-4212

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 - 11 am
Informal Wednesday Meeting 7:30 - 8:30 pm
Reading Room/Bookstore M-F: 11 am- 5 pm
(across from the Orinda Theater)

www.christianscienceorinda.org

Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church, 433 Moraga Way Orinda
Summer Worship Schedule 6/14 - 9/6

8:30 a.m. Coffee in Gregersen Hall
8:45 a.m. Nursery Care Available
9:00 a.m. Worship Service in the Sanctuary
10:00 a.m. Fellowship Time in Gregersen Hall
10:30 a.m. Nursery Closes

925-254-3422

Our Savior's Lutheran (ELCA)
1035 Carol Lane, Lafayette
283-3722 • www.oslc.net

Summer Sunday Morning Schedule
Blended Worship, 9:30-10:25 am
Adult Education, 10:30-11:15 am
"the church behind the car wash"

Beginning Sept 13:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:45 am

THE ORINDA COMMUNITY CHURCH
10 Irwin Way, Orinda, CA 925.254.4906
www.orindachurch.org

"No matter who you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!"

Join us Sundays at 10:00 a.m.

St. Anselm's Episcopal Church
A Loving Community
Sunday Services: 8 and 10 AM
Active Youth Program, Sunday School, Nursery Childcare, 10 AM
682 Michael Lane, Lafayette, 284-7420, www.stanselms.ws

Worship the Lord with us
Sundays at 9:30am



Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church
10 Moraga Valley Lane, Moraga • www.mvpc.today.org • (925) 376-4800

St. Giles Episcopal Church of Moraga
Worshipping at St. Mary's College Chapel. All are welcome at our services.
9 a.m. Sunday Service: Holy Communion - with St. Giles' Choir.
Child care is available all year.
1928 St. Mary's Road, Moraga. 925-376-5770

Willow Spring Church
1675-1689 School Street, Moraga
www.willow.springchurch.org
(925) 376-3550

Sunday Service Times:
Prayer @ 8am, Traditional @ 9am, Contemporary @ 10:30am,
Services for youth and children after worship during the 10:30am service

Weekly Activities: Wednesday Community Bible Study @ 10am
Wednesday REVERB Youth Group @ 7pm
Friday BLAST! Kids Club @ 6pm

LAMORINDA Community

Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writers and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and town (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only), and should be 350 words or less. Letters may be edited for length or legal considerations.
email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

To the editor:

Kudos to Andrea Firth on her thoughtful and informative article on the Moraga Orinda Fire District pension issue. This story has taken on a life of its own with our local daily newspaper opting for sensationalism over journalism, and the usual chorus of contrarians making ludicrous (albeit predictable) assertions that the fire chief's pension could be used to fix Orinda's roads.

Sensational accounts may provide provocative fodder for idle chatter, but they do little in the way of furthering thoughtful discourse. Moreover, it saddens me to think that this issue has been spun in such a way as to call into question the integrity of Fire Chief Pete Nowicki who has served our community with honor and professionalism for over 26 years. Certainly he, and the men and women who work under him deserve better.

Ms. Firth's was the first account I've read that actually presents the facts with a balance of opinions and calls attention to the real question, that being the long-term viability of the current pension system.

Pat Rudebusch
Orinda

Dear Editor,

This past week I attended the candidates' forum at the Soda Center auditorium at Saint Mary's College in Moraga. It was packed with 500 people. I had come to learn about the views of the Democratic and Republican candidates that are running for Ellen Tauscher's 10th District seat in the House of Representatives. I knew very little about any of the candidates, so I went to learn what they believed on many of the important issues that affect Contra Costa County and the nation.

On the main floor on either side of the stage two uniformed policemen gazed out at the crowd. As I watched them, I wondered, "What are two policemen doing at a public forum in Moraga?". Shortly after the moderator began, an elderly gentleman, right in

front of me, stood up and yelled out, "Where are the Republican candidates?" The moderator calmly stated that there would be no verbal discussion from the floor. She raised a piece of paper and said all comments need to be submitted in written form. She instructed someone to bring the man a piece of paper. The folks around the gentleman explained the evening's format to him - first the Democrats would speak, followed by the Republican candidates. The man sat down and remained throughout the evening.

The Democrats and the Republicans had equal time. Many questions were asked and answered. The candidates stayed around afterward and answered more questions. I learned a lot from all the candidates. I left feeling more informed and better prepared to make my choice for the coming election.

I went home and turned on the news. The lead story was of a town meeting where health care was the topic. There was yelling. There was anger, and there was frustration. The speaker had no chance to educate the people on his interpretation of the facts contained in the health care bill. The people had no chance to learn from him about health care. I then realized why two policemen were at the Moraga event. There was concern that the candidates would not be able to speak, due to being interrupted by a crowd of angry people. This did not happen. 500 people sat quietly, asked their questions and allowed the candidates to respond. Everyone learned.

Education is key to inform the electorate. Free speech is the right of all citizens. Dissent must be heard, but not at the cost of the free speech of others. There is room in this system for all views to be spoken and heard. Let us be sure we do not harm our system by our anger, frustration and fear. Let us remember that information is needed on all sides of an issue, and let us create environments, as was done at Saint Mary's College, where all ideas are welcome at the table. In this way we will all have a better chance of making an informed decision.

Edy Schwartz
Moraga

Public Forum JOIN IT

Moraga Orinda Fire District

I am writing in response to MOFD Director Frank Sperling's public forum article in the August 5 edition regarding Chief Nowicki's highly publicized pension. While Director Sperling spoke for the MOFD board, I think I speak for a significant percentage of Moraga-Orinda's 34,000 taxpayers.

While MOFD provides the community with superior and effective service, the community also expects that our tax dollars are well spent.

The MOFD board may feel their actions regarding Chief Nowicki's pension are appropriate, but many of us taxpayers doubt it, and a recent article and an editorial in the Contra Costa Times even question the legality of their action. The fact that these decisions increased Chief Nowicki's pension from a last year base salary of \$185,000 to a staggering (for a 51 year old municipal employee) \$242,000 (which will then be adjusted for inflation upward for the rest of his life) indicates that efficiency and financial prudence are not the district's main goals. This \$57,000 annual "bonus" will add up to \$2.7MM over the next 30 years and adds an additional \$1MM unfunded liability to the district's already seriously underfunded pension plan.

Let me address a few points Director Sperling made in his address to the community:

- 1) Director Sperling agrees that amendments were made to The Chief's contract but that these amendments were made "so that the Fire Chief's pension would be computed on a basis similar to the calculations for the lower-ranking Battalion Chiefs and Administrative staff." Lower ranking individuals in the department do not have a \$185,000 per year base salary. Three years prior to retirement, upon his elevation to chief, Chief Nowicki's salary was increased by about \$35,000. To carry that increase into retirement for the rest of his life would seem benefit enough for acting as chief for the last three years. An additional \$57,000 per year for life is excessive to say the least.
- 2) Director Sperling stated that the vacation sell-back "our Board agreed to accounts for only 3.9% of the Fire Chief's total pension." 3.9% of \$242,000 is \$9,400. But the Lamorinda Weekly says the impact of the contract amendments added 460 hours to The Chief's final year of compensation. With an \$185,000 base, 460 hours equates to about \$40,000. Another media account agrees with this \$40,000. If Director Sperling's assertion that the amendments only accounted for \$9,400, what accounted for the remaining \$48,000 increase?
- 3) Director Sperling stated that there is a major difference between private pension systems and the public safety employee

pension system; that Chief Nowicki "regularly contributed 26.5 % of his base pay to the retirement system." A \$242,000 pension, inflating at 3% for 30 years, requires a \$3.8MM investment today assuming that investment could grow at 7.8%; which the county pension system contends has been their long term investment return (before their 27% loss in 2008). Can MOFD or Chief Nowicki show that the employee plus employer contributions to the pension plan over Chief Nowicki's tenure with MOFD have grown to \$3.8MM; especially after the 2008 plan losses? Now is not the time to be handing out special pension benefits as good bye gifts unless it is contractually mandated.

4) Director Sperling stated that cutting back on a chief's salary and benefits was not reasonable as "We're a small fire and emergency medical services district that must compete with ..." At the August 5 MOFD board meeting, it was reported that in response to a search for a new chief to replace Chief Nowicki, the district had received 56 applications. Obviously, the word is out in the firefighting community that MOFD provides more than adequate compensation.

5) Going further, Director Sperling stated "Were we to offer substantially lower salaries and benefits than our competitors, our ability to recruit and retain the excellent firefighter-paramedics that we now have would be completely undercut." At a recent presentation to The Board, the firefighter in charge of the reserve program stated (a) the program was the doorway to full time employment and (b) they had to cut off the application process because the applications pile was several feet high. It appears, again, that Director Sperling's assertions are dubious at best. MOFD has 5.5 firefighters per 10,000 population. This is almost 4 times the ratio for neighboring Con Fire. The number of incidents, per capita, for the two districts is the same. The math says MOFD firefighters work 1/4 as many incidents and are open to 1/4 the risks as Con Fire firefighters. There are significant non-monetary benefits for working at MOFD as well as monetary benefits.

Director Sperling seems to blame the vagaries of the county employee pension system for Chief Nowicki's pension spike, but it appears to many that the MOFD Board may have made a gift of public funds to the former chief. The MOFD Board's contention that they have been mis-portrayed as squanderers of the public purse has yet to be proven to this taxpayer. It leads one to wonder what other inefficiencies will be uncovered.

Keith Jacobsen
Orinda
(Keith Jacobsen is a former Treasurer of the City of Orinda)

If you have significant knowledge about an issue facing Lamorinda or one of its cities that requires more than the 350 words to which we must limit Letters to the Editor, don't despair! You can submit your letter to our Public Forum section. Just send your letter to **letters@lamorindaweekly.com** and let us know you'd like to be considered for the Public Forum.