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## Moraga Town Council Denounces Hate Crimes

By Sophie Braccini

*WHEREAS, on September 7, 2009, evidence that a hate crime had been committed was discovered in Moraga; and WHEREAS, the crime was motivated by race and has caused great emotional distress and fear for the victims and our entire community; and*

*WHEREAS, such crimes and incidents are an affront to community values and can damage the fabric of our society, if concerted and firm action is not taken to address and remedy such incidents whenever they occur; and*

*WHEREAS, the Town of Moraga supports and places a high value on the diversity and inclusiveness of our community; and*

*WHEREAS, all victims of hate crimes, their families, friends and supporters are deserving of full and complete support, sympathy and encouragement from all members of the Moraga community and the Town; and*

*WHEREAS, the Town Council condemns in the strongest terms such criminal conduct, encourages all citizens to immediately report hate crimes, and asks that persons with information about hate crimes contact law enforcement.*

*NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Council that the Town of Moraga will continue to bring all of its resources to bear to prevent, and when necessary investigate and prosecute, any unlawful action or harassment of any person or persons, based on the victim's actual or perceived race or ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or gender.*

It was a moment of community bonding at the Moraga Town Council meeting on September 23rd when Chief of Police Robert Priebe presented the above resolution denouncing hate crimes. The Council and audience all seemed to share the same outrage regarding the September 7th discovery of a cross marked with the letters KKK in front of a house where a mixed-race couple was spending the night with family.

"It was a kick in the gut," said neighbor Dave Robertson, who was the first to notice the cross, "it is a wake up call." Robertson added that the neighbors had been discussing ways to make things more visible and were thinking about organizing a block party.

"My kids and I talked about the incident," says Carol Shenon, another neighbor. "I never could have imagined that such a horrific symbol could appear in Moraga. It is completely unacceptable, and I hope that the perpetrator(s) are found and prosecuted."

Moraga resident Reverend John Valentine says that this incident should be used to educate: "This can become an awareness-building moment, as long as we don't sweep it under the rug," said Valentine. The Reverend went further and challenged the town's residents to do something differently and look at Martin Luther King Junior Day as an opportunity to fly the American flag as a reminder of what happened.

Mayor Dave Trotter said, "This is not the Moraga that I know." He, too, wanted to make it a moment of education and added, "We might want to talk about it with the School District."

Vice-Mayor Ken Chew wanted to incorporate what he felt was stronger language into the resolution, including the addition of the word "racism" alongside "hate crime." The majority of the Council did not concur and the resolution, as drafted by Priebe, was adopted by a vote of 4-1.

### Not the Only Incident

Recent Campolindo graduate Roshan Mahoney says of the September 7th hate crime, "The fact that we're allowing ideas like that to be fostered in our town is something we should all be concerned about." And according to Mahoney, this was not the only incident to happen in Moraga over the summer.

Mahoney says that on July 25th she was shocked to see a swastika painted on The Rock (up on the hill at the intersection of Moraga Rd and Rheem Blvd). "I was with my friend Molly, who is Jewish; at first I wanted to believe it was something else; just a random bunch of squiggles. I didn't want to think anyone here would do something like that." Unable to reconcile the hope to the reality, she says the two young women felt, "just disgusted that someone would do something that disrespectful."

That night they climbed up to The Rock, only to find others of similar mind who had already poured white paint over the offending symbol. "We decided to paint a peace sign," said Mahoney, because we didn't want to paint it over with anything that would put anyone down or offend anyone, we just wanted to make a statement that this is a town that won't tolerate that."

L. Borrowman

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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