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## TEST DRIVING THE GOOD LIFE

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Looking throughout the United States we have only been able to find one Family Owned and Managed Retirement Company that offers to put their money where their mouth is. Surprisingly, that Family Business is located right here in Contra Costa County.

These family operated communities have been offering their **Exclusive 70/70, 100% Money Back Guarantee for over 25 years.** Discussing the program with the family we asked, "Why and how can you offer such a generous guarantee program?"

They explained that their **70/70 Guarantee Program** first must meet some "very basic" requirements. (This is where we thought, here comes the catch-- but we were wrong). They stated that the first requirement is that the resident must be 70 years young. Second and last requirement is the resident must live in the community for a minimum of 70 days. If after the seventy day requirement the resident decides that the community is not to his or her liking, the resident can give notice, move-out and the community will refund **100% of all rent money paid.**

So how can they offer such an outlandish guarantee? Well, to quote Tom Mac Donald, the patriarch of the family business that operates Independent, Assisted Living and Memory Care Communities. "It is our responsibility to every senior that moves into one of our communities that we provide the **Quality of Services and Resident Respect that we promised** upon move-in. This Guarantee gives the resident and their family comfort that we are not just giving them a sales pitch. I can honestly say that over the last 25 years we have only had a mere handful of residents, 10 or less that have asked for a refund and we have had over 7500 residents live with us over the last 25 years". To learn more about these communities, Call **(888) 472-1751.**

## • Life in LAMORINDA •

### Open Opera at Orinda Community Park

By Andrea A. Firth



Open Opera on June 23rd at the Orinda Community Park

Photos provided

On Sunday, October 11th Orindans and their neighbors will be able to broaden their musical horizons beyond the folk, rock, and pop bands of the summer concert series, and hear opera sung by the artists from Open Opera—a new Bay Area company that brings free opera by professional-quality singers to the parks.

"Open Opera is really a marriage of the parks and art," states Ellen St. Thomas, an opera singer who started the nonprofit arts organization with colleagues Olivia Stapp and Elizabeth Baker in 2008 with the goal of producing opera in free outdoor venues as a means of building community and expanding and diversifying opera audiences. "Opera-goers love the casual nature of the outdoor concerts, and newcomers to opera get a great introduction to it," adds St. Thomas, who has also worked with several youth choruses in the area including the chorus at Campolindo High School.

Started with a couple of grants and further supported through fundraising, Open Opera has pre-

sented four concerts in the past year including a full-scale production of *The Marriage of Figaro* in Berkeley's John Hinkel Park that was attended by over 700 spectators. The Orinda concert will feature classics and favorites from a variety of operas. "This concert will be more like opera's greatest hits," states St. Thomas. "The songs will be crowd pleasers such as [Verdi's] Rigoletto quartet. The crowd always loves [the format]."

Among the 11 performers slated for the Orinda Open Opera concert are two local singers: Orinda resident Lisa van der Ploeg and Campolindo High School senior Erika Henningsen.

Van der Ploeg is a mezzo-soprano with a long resume of opera performance credits throughout the United States. One of her most recent performances occurred when she was asked to spontaneously sing at the Rotary Field Days held at her children's school, Wagner Ranch Elementary. "I thought 'this is crazy,' as they handed me the microphone," says van der Ploeg who quickly chose to sing a piece from *Carmen*,

an opera in which she has toured playing the title role. "This hush went over the crowd, and the children just marched toward me. The magic of the music was so amazing," she adds. "I'm looking forward to bringing opera to my neighbors and other people I know. It's great to be able to have opera in the park."



### A Perfect Pairing with the Community

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The Captain's terraced vineyard became bonded in May

Photo Andy Scheck

The Captain's remaining children were recruited to train, prune, thin, and pick the vines and friends were enlisted as needed. Susan's friend, Kesnija Olmer, became so committed to the vineyard that she adopted three rows of grapevines that she cares for as her own. Four years into the process, the now leafy-green vines are reaching maturity. Captain Vineyards became a bonded winery in May, the second in Lamorinda, which enables them to make and sell wine under their own label.

The Captain's 3,500 grapevines horizontally traverse the hillside that falls away from the back of their home. The 350-step terraced vineyard has 120 lanes that are oriented to take the best advantage of the sun while minimizing erosion and provid-

ing easy access to the grapes. A panorama of golden-yellow, undulating hills serves as the backdrop for the vineyard—a picturesque landscape, which could easily be mistaken for the Napa Valley, that faces northwest toward Lafayette.

"The most important part of wine is a good grape," states Susan, who makes sharing her knowledge and love of viticulture a priority. She has taught organic winegrowing practices to young people through the Lamorinda 4-H Club and a Miramonte High School internship program. This winter, Susan plans to begin offering classes in wine grape management to the community.

In contrast to Susan's affinity to the vine, according to Sal, "Everything starts in the

garage." He has emerged as the enologist of the pair. After contracting with other wineries to produce their wine for the past three years, the Captains plan to gradually move the production of their vineyard's eight tons of grapes in-house. Sal has outfitted the garage with a crusher/destemmer, press, and filter in preparation for processing 1.5 tons of grapes, which will produce about 900 bottles of their petite sirah/cabernet sauvignon blend this year. Sal has also reclaimed the naturally cool basement space below the house for bottling, storage and wine tasting. Together Susan and Sal look forward to tasting the product of this vintage, which will be released sometime in 2012.

As the Captains have watched their grapes grow, they

have also observed the propagation of vineyards in Lamorinda and had the opportunity to meet and work with other local vineyard owners through their involvement in the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association. "People who enjoy wine have a good disposition," states Sal. "We have met some really interesting people through this adventure," says Susan, adding, "You really have to be passionate about wine making. You have to love the land and love doing it."

#### Lamorinda Winegrowing on the Rise

The number of backyard vineyards dotting the hills of Lamorinda is on the rise. The Lamorinda Winegrowers Association has grown exponentially since its inception in 2005 according to Dave Parker, who, with his wife Shari Simon, owns Parkmon Vineyards in Moraga. "When we first started [the Association], there were about 23 vineyards. Now we have a directory of 85 vineyards in Lamorinda," says Parker. "About half of the vineyards are trying to produce wine from their grapes—some are home winemakers, some pay to have their wine made, and others sell or exchange their grapes for wine production," he adds. Parkmon Vineyards, the first commercial winery established in Lamorinda, expects to produce 900 cases of wine this year with 2/3 of the grapes sourced from 11 different Lamorinda vineyards. Parkmon's wine production has more than doubled in the past three years and the percentage of grapes sourced locally has increased two-fold.