

Life in LAMORINDA

Winter Wood Fires: Burning too much, Lamorinda?

By Sophie Braccini



www.istockphoto.com

At a recent Rotary meeting Contra Costa County Supervisor Gayle Uilkema expressed her concern over the wood burning habits of Lamorindans. Uilkema is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD); she noticed too many unhealthy days reported in Contra Costa, so she decided to find out if the jurisdictions of her district, including Moraga, Lafayette and Orinda, are in the habit of burning wood. The results are in and are not very complementary for Lamorinda. Are we

burning too much wood? "The air quality agency operates monitoring stations that check that we are meeting our objectives in term of air quality with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)," explains Uilkema, "and if evidence of high rates of particulate matters is found in the air, we start accumulating violation days. The consequence is that we immediately have to make a new federal plan with the EPA, and federal money for transportation is withheld from the area." Uilkema points out that, more importantly,

these particulate matters are unhealthy, and make it difficult for people with asthma, other respiratory or heart conditions to breathe when concentration rises.

According to the BAAQMD, wood smoke is the largest source of wintertime air pollution in the Bay Area. When there is no wind to disperse pollutants from smoke, they become trapped close to the ground. "When temperatures drop and with very little wind, a blanket of wood particles lingers over the residences," says Uilkema, "on 'Spare the Air' days, I have seen a horizontal cloud caused by wood burning hovering over Lafayette."

A concerned Uilkema decided to poll residents to find out if her district was doing its part and reducing wood burning. "For the last 3 1/2 years I have sent polls to communities, randomly," says Uilkema, "One of the questions is 'do you burn wood in a fire place or open pit?' What is scary is that 61.8% of Lafayette residents said yes, in Orinda 43.5%, and in Moraga 39.1% reported burning wood." As a comparison, only



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28% of Hercules residents and 5.3% in Rossmoor burn wood. Among Canyon residents, however, 77.7% burn wood.

Uilkema believes that these numbers are concerning and she wants to raise the awareness of her constituency and urge them to choose alternatives. "Any type of burning is prohibited on Spare the Air days," says Uilkema, who reminds residents that the BAAQMD can fine offenders that are found burning on those days. "Finding out what days are 'Spare the Air' days is easy," she says, "You can call the Air District to receive automated email or phone alert messages." Residents concerned about burning emission can call 800-334-ODOR to report the problem.

The Winter Spare the Air season runs from November 1, 2009, through February 28, 2010. During this period, it is illegal to burn wood, pellets, or manufac-

tured fire logs when a Winter Spare the Air Alert is issued. Residents can ask to receive automated PhoneAlert notification telephone

calls by calling 1-800-430-1515 or sign up for e-mail alerts at <http://baaqmdsparetheair.enviroflash.info/>.

Orinda Library January Exhibit

By Andrea A. Firth



Photo by Andrew Grupe

Six artists with a diverse set of creative interests will exhibit their works at the Orinda Library Art Gallery throughout the month of January. The Gallery exhibits, which rotate each month, are sponsored by the Orinda Arts Council and feature the works of Bay Area artists including many who reside in Lamorinda. The Gallery extends along the hallway outside the Library entrance and through the corridor to the Library auditorium.

"I consider myself a dedicated amateur photographer," says

Andrew Grupe, an Orinda resident whose photographs are part of the January exhibit. "One place I really like to go to photograph is the Mount Diablo foothills," states Grupe. "Every time I walk through I see something different." Grupe's interest in photography started when he was teen. He worked summer jobs to save money for camera equipment and taught himself to develop his own film. A few years ago he made the switch to digital, which he used for the photos in this exhibit, and he has not looked back.

Long-time resident of Orinda Lucia Bennhoff will also be part of the January exhibit. "When my youngest daughter went away to college I enrolled in the Wood Technology Department at Laney College. At first I was very intimidated by the machines, but I enjoyed the design and problem solving aspects and overcame the intimidation," says Bennhoff. She went on to set up a workshop in the basement room of her home and has been making furniture for the past 12 years. Bennhoff works with hard woods using the natural color of the woods and no stain.



Jewelry by Monica Borenstein. Photo provided

Also in the exhibit are photographer Dan Cavalier, utilitarian artist Roger Yee, jewelry designer Monica Borenstein, and artist Terrie Chan who creates beautiful beaded eggs. The artists will host a reception at the Gallery on January 9th from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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MOFD Board Elects 2010 Officers, New Public Information Campaign Outlined

By Lucy Amaral

Frank Sperling will serve as President for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's (MOFD) Board of Directors in 2010. The nomination and election of officers was held at the December 16 board meeting, and the new term will begin on January 1, 2010. Sperling held the position of Vice-President for the 2009 Board year.

Along with Sperling, the new line-up includes: John Wyro, Vice-President; Fred Weil, Secretary; Brook Mancinelli, Treasurer; and, Pete Wilson, the former President, will return to a general Board Member position. Wilson was presented with a plaque from the Board commemorating his year of service as President.

During the meeting, Wyro outlined his conceptual plan for the Board's public information strategy. Among the actions, Wyro said he would like to schedule public sessions throughout the year

to gather public input, especially around the areas of mid-year budget review, strategic plan review, long range financial forecasting, budget presentation review and the final budget review and adoption.

"We would like to hold our work sessions in larger spaces and possibly move them around the district," said Wyro. "These are meetings we normally have, but we want to make a greater effort to reach out and encourage participation."

Wyro also said that he would like to see a larger-scope public information campaign be implemented including mailers, newsletters, press releases, public presentations, and increased web site information.

"On MOFD's web site, we want to have a Frequently Asked Question section with specific information related to district opera-

tions so that the public can be better informed on the hows and whys of the district," said Wyro. "We want to explain the facts and issues to anyone interested. The questions will come from a list we are developing and any submitted by the public, so it will be a dynamic section."

Wyro said he hopes that this effort will address the public's concern for more transparency.

"I feel that in light of what has happened over the last year, we have not done a good enough job of getting our message out and hearing if community needs have changed," said Wyro. "We are striving to continue our work to maintain the MOFD as the provider of the highest level of emergency and public service to our community. I believe an enhanced public information campaign will make sure we are doing just that."

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