



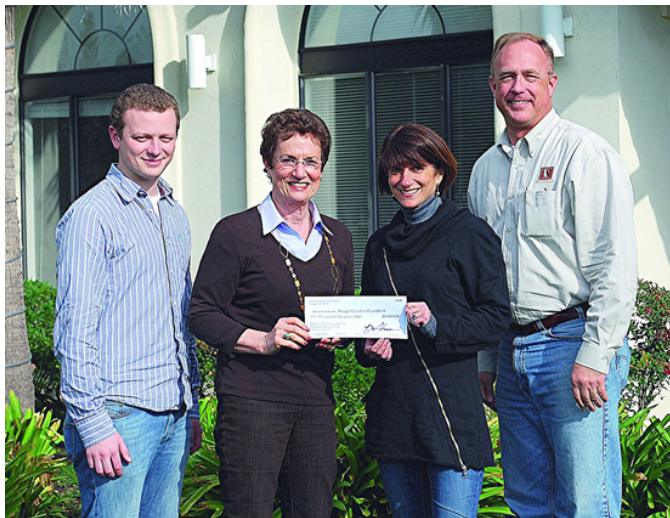
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Lamorinda Chambers of Commerce Step Up to Help Schools

By Sophie Braccini



The Moraga Chamber gives a check to MEF (L-R): Chamber board member Grant Stubblefield, Chamber President Edy Schwartz, MEF President Shari Simon, MEF Chair of Business and Community Relations Eric Andresen Photo Sohie Braccini

For Lifson, giving to the schools is a natural act. "We live and work in this incredible community of Lamorinda and the base for it is education," says Lifson. "We live in a symbiotic relationship with the schools and it is not only the money that makes the relationship so wonderful, it is the volunteers who create the kind of community we live in."

Lifson is aware that local home values are linked to the quality of the public schools, and so is Edy Schwartz, the President of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce. "We all know this and our realtors confirm it; the first reason people move to our communities is the school districts," says Schwartz, "and with the extreme cuts from the State, it is most important to give to the schools." Sue Breedlove, President of the Orinda Chamber, agrees with her, "It's more imperative than ever to help our schools when funding is becoming so difficult to get," says Breedlove.

As a result, the Orinda Chamber of Commerce will donate some of the proceeds from the upcoming Live at the Orinda, an evening of comedy at the Orinda Theater, to the Educational Foundation of Orinda (EFO). "For the last two years the Chamber has held the Orinda Restaurant Tour and more than 30% of every ticket sale went to EFO," adds Breedlove, "In 2008 we donated \$2500 and in 2009 \$2100. Most likely, we will do the same thing this fall."

In Moraga, the Moraga Education Foundation (MEF) is a member of the Chamber of Commerce. Until recently, the support of the business community had primarily been through generous business owners contributing directly to school auctions and the MEF. But this year the Chamber Board felt that the situation was so critical that it had to do something more, and in January it decided to donate \$1,000 to MEF. "Now more than ever it is vital that Moraga's parents and citizens, schools, and businesses join forces to support and maintain our community," said Eric Andresen, the chair of the MEF Business and Community Partners Committee upon receiving the check, "Our property values, our community and even our cherished way of life depend upon the continued success of our businesses and upon the unparalleled reputation of our schools. We're all in this together, and working together we can and will maintain what we've all come to know and love as our home."

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Businesses across Lamorinda proudly display the little plaques that local sports teams, schools and foundations have given them in thanks for their support. But that is not the only way the business community comes through for the schools. As the education system suffers financially due to deep cuts to State funding, the local Chambers of Commerce, which have long understood that schools are part of the system that sustains them, are strengthening their efforts to support our schools.

The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce has been donating proceeds from its signature business events to the Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation (LASF) and the Lafayette School District for many years. "When we started the Art and Wine Festival fifteen years ago, LASF was the only beneficiary of the event," recalls Jay Lifson, the Chamber's Executive Director, "since then we've added other recipients, but the Foundation has remained the primary beneficiary." Last year the Chamber gave \$8,500 to LASF and Lifson believes that over the years the Chamber has contributed nearly 70,000 to LASF in addition to a dozen other charities that benefit from the festival.

The second big Lafayette Chamber fundraiser that benefits the schools is the Lafayette Reservoir Run. "Each year the Chamber is able to donate \$15,000-\$20,000 to the PTAs at each of our five local schools," adds Lifson.