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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

I have noticed your article about a group of people trying to ban leaf blowers. I suggest they do not use leaf blowers if they do not like them, but do not presume to dictate to others we cannot use them.

Leaf blowers, chain saws, wood chippers, and weed eaters are necessary in Orinda. Most of Orinda is a forest, which drops leaves on all flat surfaces. Trees need to be pruned, and grass needs to be cut. It is not practical to do this by hand. This fascist attempt to ban leaf blowers, if successful will lead to attempts to ban other necessary power tools. It would immediately lead to great hardship and extra expense to hundreds of people in Orinda.

Furthermore, the proposition that leaf blowers is a health hazard is nonsense! Leaf blowers are only used when there is no wind. They do not work in the wind. However much particulate matter is put into air by leaf blowers, is completely insignificant compared to wind blowing dust and pollen. This is especially true in Orinda where we have a lot of wind and trees. In still air, leaf blowers only move the particulate matter a few feet before it settles to the ground again.

Banning leaf blowers is wrong! These people should try persuading their neighbors to do their leaf blowing at one particular space of time. This impulse to ban those activities of other people that can be annoying, but are harmless, leads to tyranny.

Henry R. Pinney
Orinda

Editor:

I am opposed to the use of power leaf-blowers of any kind for all the well-known reasons. As I do not own a large Orinda estate with a 6000 square foot deck such as a previous writer mentioned, I do not have the "inconvenience" of having to sweep such a large area (or have it swept for me). On our little cul-de-sac just off Moraga Way, for example, there is an outside gardener who arrives early in a pick-up truck and tends a few of the yards by firing up his gasoline blower at 7:30 a.m. almost every day. This is annoying, noisy, unhealthy, and irritating of my and my wife's allergies but he doesn't seem to care despite requests to cease. In a small and more confined area such as ours, it's much worse than on the larger estates in Orinda Village. Those who want to bike or jog or walk their dog have to put up with this almost every day. I say, no more!

John Windle
Orinda

To the Editor:

Girl Scout troops in Moraga and Orinda took possession of almost 3800 cases of cookies on Sunday, February 21st. That's over 45,000 boxes of cookies! Many helped to make this "Distribution Day" run smoothly.

We want to publicly thank the crew at the Moraga Fire Station 42 at 555 Moraga Road, who has been kind enough to let us use the station house as the distribution point of our Girl Scout cookies for a number of years. Due to the size of the garage, we are able to have the cookies delivered, divided into orders, and loaded into cars inside, keeping the cookies and volunteers dry in the rainy weather.

A huge thank you to the Sunday morning crews of Moraga Stations 42 and 41 for helping early in the day. The cases of cookies were delivered in 8-10 foot stacks, which made it quite difficult to get to the top cases. The delivery arrived about an hour later than last year, creating a time crunch for the volunteers to get orders assembled. As the firefighters from Station 42 began dismantling the stacks, Acting Captain Anthony Perry called for additional help from Moraga Station 41 across town. Within an hour, firefighters from both stations had the stacks reduced into piles that were reachable by our volunteers. Meanwhile, our volunteers were able to start organizing orders for pick ups, keeping us on schedule.

We'd also like to thank the Lafayette locations of Peets Coffee and Noah's Bagels for their donations of coffee and bagels, respectively. The annual cookie sale is the biggest fundraiser for the Girl Scout organization and we appreciate all the support we get from the Lamorinda Community.

Cookie sales continue until March 21. For a booth near you, visit the convenient online Cookie Locator at ilovecookies.org.

Sincerely,

Jeanette Fritzy and MaryEllen Gustafson
(Co-Managers Cookie Sales Orinda/Moraga Service Unit)
Moraga

Dear Editor -

Now that the Town of Moraga Town Council has come up with their list of priorities, I would like to share with your readers my list of priorities for the Town of Moraga. So here goes -

1. Focus on safety, roads, and infrastructure ONLY for the near term future
2. Reduce staff overhead (salaries, benefits) by at least 20% either by attrition or by layoffs or both
3. Eliminate all trips effective immediately by council members or town staff unless funds by personal and non-reimbursed funds
4. Eliminate all current and proposed real estate purchases authorized by the Moraga Town Council
5. Declare a moratorium on any proposed modifications to the Moraga General Plan
6. Sell the Moraga Country Club golf course to the Moraga Country Club and use the proceeds for infrastructure maintenance
7. Plan and budget on state revenue for the next fiscal year (2010-2011) to fall another 20%
8. Re-vamp the membership and goals and re-name the Revenue Enhancement Committee to the Citizens Budget Advisory Committee and focus on both revenue and Expenditures
9. Approve the Hetfield and Rancho Laguna projects to improve town revenues
10. Make a concerted and meaningful effort to improve communications and relations with the Moraga School District Governing Board
11. Set a 10:00 P.M. deadline for all future Moraga Town Council meetings
12. Accept the will and vote of the people with respect to development issues such as Measure K and cease the efforts to enhance municipal ordinances without the approval of the general public.

I hope others submit their list of priorities to the Moraga Town Council for discussion and debate. Always keep in mind....the Moraga Town Council works for us and not us for them.

Dennis Wanken
Moraga

Measure A

(Editor's note: We are providing extra space in this issue so that we can publish as many letters as possible; although we have received and published, in prior issues, letters from residents opposed to Measure A, none were sent to us in the last two weeks.)

Editor:

As a fiscally conservative voter, I often shake my head as the state legislature dreams up new ways to spend our tax dollars. As the state careens towards insolvency, many voters now watch as vital programs such as education face serious cuts.

Generally, I am not in favor of tax increases, especially in light of our current economic situation and since tax dollars seem to dissolve instantly upon contact with our legislature.

But I also have two school age children, including one who will be entering high school next year and I support Measure A.

Some letter writers have suggested that the Acalanes Union High School District could easily reduce expenses, without suggesting specific areas where the "fat" is. A closer look at the budget for the AUHSD would reveal that the district is, in fact, very well run.

So while I don't support increases in the state income or sales tax, I do favor a tax such as Measure A that bypasses the sticky fingers of the state legislature and goes directly to our schools. Every homeowner in the area will benefit from this modest investment of \$112 per year in our schools.

Sincerely,
Julie E. Carlson
Moraga

To the editor:

I urge your readers to take the time to get the facts on the fiscal pressures facing the Acalanes High School District and to learn how we can help save our excellent local high schools. Campolindo, Acalanes, Miramonte, and Los

Lomas are routinely among the top performing schools in the state. Yet, today, our schools are being forced to cut classes and teachers in order to make up over \$8 million in state funding shortfalls.

News of the impending cuts has hit our family particularly hard since it means that our son, who is now a freshman at Campolindo, and our 6th grade daughter at Joaquin Moraga will not have access to many of the classes they will need in order to compete with their counterparts from other states and other countries. It's unconscionable that California, the eighth largest economy in the world, cannot adequately fund education.

Measure A may not solve all of the financial challenges facing our schools, but it will help preserve core classes and give our kids a fighting chance for their future.

David and Sabine Hathaway
Moraga

Editor:

Miramonte High School offers a unique educational experience. While it has the freedom of a public school, it also offers a superb academic curriculum. Currently, I am a sophomore at Princeton University. Without the outstanding teachers I've had the privilege to learn from and the wide selection of classes, I would not be attending this prestigious school, nor would I have discovered my passion for engineering. I strongly encourage you and all readers to pass the parcel tax, as this will allow Miramonte to continue to uphold its outstanding academic standard. The students of the Lamorinda area deserve the chance to pursue the courses they're interested in. Please don't take that opportunity away from them: support the parcel tax.

Alexa Krakaris
Orinda

Editor:

When my eldest daughter graduated from Campolindo in 2001, our local high schools were a source of community pride for the strength and breadth of their academic programs. Today, I fear that my twins, who are in the Class of 2014, will not have access to the same academic opportunities that their older sister enjoyed.

Absent local action, the Acalanes High School District will have to lay-off over 50 teachers. Cuts of this magnitude will severely hamper our schools' ability to meet the needs of our students. A loss of 50 teachers means cuts in core programs such as science, English, and social studies as well as art and foreign language classes. Such cuts will gut the very programs that we have worked so hard to maintain.

Thankfully, we have an opportunity to blunt the effect of the state's funding cuts by raising funds locally to keep teachers in the classrooms and help our students acquire the knowledge they need to be the leaders of tomorrow. Measure A, a five-year emergency tax, will provide these funds. Please join me in voting yes for our schools, yes for our teachers, and yes for our students, by voting Yes on Measure A.

Jeanette Fritzký
Moraga

Editor:

As the mother of two children now in fifth and seventh grades, it's disheartening to see what the state's fiscal crisis is doing to our schools. California schools have been falling further and further behind the national average, but I have always taken pride in the fact that Orinda's schools have maintained a standard of excellence. Just this December, Miramonte was identified as one of America's best high schools by U.S. News & World Reports. How troubling it is now to learn of impending teacher lay-offs and cuts to classes that will severely impact the educational opportunities available to our youth.

We can blame the state's fiscal woes on the economic downturn, our legislators, or the voters who sent them to Sacramento. But, we cannot blame our youth. Unfortunately, unless we can pull together to save our schools, it is our youth who will suffer.

This fiscal crisis undoubtedly will pass, but I fear not before my children and their classmates move on to high school. Please help preserve the quality education our community is known for by voting Yes on Measure A. It is a temporary measure that gives our high school a much-needed fiscal lifeline.

Susan Rockwood
Orinda

Editor:

Food, education, clothing, shelter. When was it that education got dropped as one of our basic necessities? My husband and I moved seven years ago seeking the education for our two daughters that so many in our state can only dream to experience. Through those years we've come to realize the trophy we landed ourselves and to witness the sacrifices the families in this community have made for the sake of learning and village camaraderie. The dedication of the countless fathers, mothers, teachers and administrators is a poignant testament to how deeply ingrained education is to this area.

I am writing this from the heart of a community and asking for your help. A parcel tax of \$112/parcel or .31/day will help maintain programs that currently give our students the competitive edge when applying to colleges. It will allow teachers to maintain manageable class sizes, allow students to receive the attention they deserve and let current school hours to remain undisturbed. It will prevent our award winning music programs from being cut and enable us to maintain strong sports venues. It will allow us to keep and continue to achieve National Blue Ribbon Awards and in turn allow this to all reflect in our high property values.

In a state where budget deficits and layoffs will surely impact everyone, we have the power to overcome the statistics and remain no.1.

Please vote yes on Measure A.

Tina Tankka
Lafayette

Dear Editor:

I remember when California was rated in the top 3 for education amongst the states. Now it is rated in the bottom 3. Those high rated times were before Proposition 13. On top of that, California is only one of 4 states that requires a 2/3 vote to raise taxes. Neither of these is good for democracy. Justice Holmes remarked that taxes are the price that we pay for civilization.

The Measure A Tax is \$112/year or less than 3 lattes per month. Those in dire straits might well vote against this tax, but most Lamorinda citizens can afford this. The measure has an exemption clause for those over 65, which I think for me, is a mistake.

My property taxes are over \$10,000 /year less than my neighbor's taxes, because I am covered by Proposition 13. Other long term residents should consider this windfall before deciding against a \$112/year tax increase. I will vote for the tax and I will pay the tax.

My house's value has increased 20X in 40 years. House values have decreased for some, but many of us, like myself, have had high appreciation in the value of our homes. Good schools and teachers are responsible for a good part of this appreciation. Please vote for this tax.

Sincerely,

Hubert Russell
Orinda

Editor:

California underfunds its schools – we rank 46th in the nation on spending per pupil. Acalanes Union School District's response for many years has been to invest locally controlled funds from a school parcel tax. These funds allow Acalanes, the top ranked high school district in California, to remain competitive in spite of consecutive years of state budget reductions.

Our children graduated from Miramonte and have gone on to top notch University of California programs. We are happy to pay an additional \$112 annually to ensure that the students of the future have the same opportunities that our kids had. Core curriculum, staffing, AP classes, foreign language, journalism, public speaking and other vital programs are all at stake.

Please join us in supporting Measure A.

Robin and Paul Ludmer
Orinda

Dear Editor,

We moved to Orinda because of the reputation of the schools. In the nine years since, my children have thrived from classes and teachers that engaged and challenged them to reach their potential. My daughter, now a college freshman back East, was able to pursue varied interests in history, public speaking, creative writing, psychology and advanced math. She got more than just a basic education and is able to succeed in a very competitive environment.

I want the same lasting foundation for my 9th grader and for all our children in the district. Without Measure A passing, 50 plus teachers will be laid off, affecting programs and classes that enrich our childrens' lives and help them be successful in the future. I believe as a community we need to rally around our children. \$112 a year for five years seems a small price to pay to give them the tools to succeed. Please join me in voting Yes for Measure A.

Susie Epstein
Orinda

To the Editor:

In these tough economic times, our Acalanes District high schools are facing a fiscal crisis despite sound management practices. The persistent reductions in funding for education from the State of California are now so significant that our District will spend less than half of what similar schools in New York State spend per student annually. Next year, our District will receive \$8 million less in state funding than two years ago. Yet our students are expected to compete at a national level for increasingly demanding college admissions. Through no fault of their own, the Acalanes District high school students stand to lose important science, math, English, arts and AP classes. These critical classes have helped rank our District amongst the best in the state and the nation for over 55 years! While new taxes can be painful, not passing a \$112 short-term emergency parcel tax to protect our schools would be worse. A weakened school system will have a lasting negative impact on our community and our property values. Strong schools and strong communities go hand in hand. Please join me in voting Yes on Measure A.

Sandra Breber
Orinda

To the Editor:

A recently published letter questioned what type of message we would be sending our children by voting in favor of the Acalanes High School District's parcel tax given these challenging economic times. That message, I believe, is that education matters.

By voting in favor of Measure A, we'll be showing our children that education is a priority that deserves our attention in good times and in bad. Surely, there's no better investment in the future than investing in our youth today. And for my money, there's no better investment in education than in our local schools, which continue to rank among the top schools in the state.

Our high schools are not asking for extras. The \$112 parcel tax will simply help protect students and teachers from the state's continuing budget cuts. Considering that California's schools already are among the lowest funded, with some of the largest class sizes in the nation, further cuts to schools will seriously erode the quality of education our schools can provide. Please don't let this happen. Vote Yes on Measure A.

Margarita Woodbury
Lafayette

Editor:

We write to urge our fellow Lamorindans to vote Yes on Measure A. Acalanes Union High School District is facing a \$4.8 million budget cut. Over 50 full time teaching positions are facing elimination! Firing these teachers will cut deep into the core curriculum, including eliminating our students' seventh periods. We are blessed with some of the top public schools in California and the country. These schools have been our area's crown jewel for generations. Remember when you bought property in Lamorinda? We knew by buying and living in our community our children were guaranteed an academically-top education, at public school "prices." Who among us didn't weigh the huge savings and peace of mind we would experience during our children's K-12 years because some of the best schools in the country were in our home town?

Public education in Lamorinda is an amazing bargain; friends in San Francisco, Marin and other communities routinely pay \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year for their children's K-12 education. But top public schools are not free. Parents volunteer long hours in our schools and all of us contribute financially. Payment of our parcel taxes is a crucial part of our economic support. These payments are not only a tremendous investment in our children's future, they literally ensure the continued viability of our schools and property value. Passage of Measure A demonstrates to Lamorinda citizens and prospective citizens alike that our community is still among the best places to live and raise a family.

Over and over, when our students return from college they talk about how well prepared they were by our local schools and how college is often "easier" than their high school experience. For our children's future and for our economic well being, we must continue to support our schools without reservation. In these tough economic times, we all are getting by on less. But Measure A's \$112 per parcel annual investment in our schools - allowing us to

preserve our core curriculum and teacher positions -- is something we cannot afford to do without. Vote Yes on Measure A!

Ben and Janet Riley
Orinda

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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