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Rescue One

Dedicated to the support of MOFD paramedics

By Lucy Amaral

The concern over emergency medical services and response times may be a hot-button issue right now in Lamorinda, but it's not a new issue.

Founded in 1978, the Moraga-based Rescue One Foundation grew out of the community's desire for quality, effective, local emergency medical service.

In the early 1970's, the Town of Moraga's fire department had several firefighters cross-trained as emergency medical technicians (EMTs), but ambulance transport was provided by outside services.

According to Linda Borelli, board member for the Rescue One

Foundation, having ambulances travel various distances to reach Moraga was always a concern, but it took a near fatality to effect change.

"The husband of a Moraga Service League member suffered an accident at his home. His femoral artery was lacerated," said Borelli. "The response time for an ambulance to arrive from Walnut Creek was 25 minutes, and the travel time to Alta Bates Hospital, another 20 minutes. By the time he arrived at the hospital, he was not breathing and had no pulse. His life was saved only after he received 23 pints of blood."

The Service League members saw the importance of response time in saving a life, added Borelli. Therefore, it was simple: The Town of Moraga needed its own ambulance. After a meeting with (and blessing from) Moraga's then Fire Chief, Don Skinner, the Service League got to work.

"The community came together in fundraising for the ambulance," said Borelli. "A door-to-door campaign by League members was launched and they asked for one dollar from each household. The League raised \$8,000, enough to purchase the ambulance, a new 1972 Dodge van."



The first ambulance for the Moraga Fire District, a 1972 Dodge van, donated by Moraga Service League. L to R: Service League members Carol Porterfield and Jean Scott, two members of the Moraga Fire Commission, League member Jean Kirsch. The two uniformed members of the Moraga Fire District are John Cooper on the left, and Chief Don Skinner on the right. Photo provided

With the van donated to the Fire District, the League took on the new challenge of raising money to help the District purchase the equipment and supplies for the ambulance. Several fundraisers later and the first Moraga Rescue Ambulance was ready to roll.

Watching this was Marian Devin, widow of fire commissioner Ray Devin. Borelli said that with money available from her late husband's memorial fund, Devin approached the fire district and the Service League to see if a separate foundation could be formed to continue the support the rescue services. "She spearheaded the Foundation's formation," said Borelli. In 1978, with Devin's original donation, all the official paperwork complete, and a seven-member

board made up of Service League members and community leaders, the Rescue One Foundation was born, becoming California's first foundation dedicated entirely to supporting its local fire district and paramedic program.

Support of the Foundation was immediate. "People started contributing (right away)," said Borelli. "We have never had to fundraise. Service organizations continue to donate, and there have been gifts of appreciation as well as in memoriam."

Over the past 30 years, the Foundation has received more than \$300,000 in donations, allowing Rescue One to donate items including CPR training equipment, paramedic training scholarships, cardiac monitors, defibrillators,

and emergency equipment such as the "Jaws of Life."

Today, Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) ambulances may be state-of-the-art rather than retrofitted vans, but the dedication from Rescue One remains the same: Support MOFD paramedics.

"The Rescue One Foundation's support of MOFD over the past 33 years has been tremendous," said Randy Bradley, MOFD Fire Chief. "The Foundation understands the importance of providing superior paramedic and ambulance services to the communities of Moraga, Orinda and Canyon. The donations have allowed the District to go above and beyond basic service levels that are offered elsewhere."

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