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Will Frisbees Collide With Dogs and/or Bocce Ball?

By Sophie Braccini



Anthony Jaussand, Meat Manager at the Orinda Safeway, practices disc golf at the Moraga Commons
Photo Sophie Braccini

On a beautiful weekend day one can spot as many as 90 people playing disc golf at the back of the Moraga Commons Park, at the corner of Moraga Road and Saint Mary's Road. Most players carry a small bag filled with 15-25 Frisbees of different characteristics, and they follow the nine-hole course (actually 9-basket course), trying to reach each target with three throws or less.

Year 'round, players of all ages practice on what is a rare commodity in the Bay Area: a 9-hole course set in a beautiful, peaceful and semi-wild setting. For 27 years the players have grown in number, coming from as close as Saint Mary's College and as far as Benicia. But recently the players got wind of the possible installation of a new bocce ball court where one of their holes is set, and of the discussion of moving the Rancho Laguna de facto dog park to a portion of the Commons where two of their holes are located. Concern led them to the February 25th Council meeting, where they pleaded for the protection of what they consider a gem.

The course was funded in 1982 by a donation from the Moraga Women's Society. According to Jon Beernink, an advocate for the players. "At the time, there were only 100 courses in the U.S., most of them target courses (with a

simple pole to aim at), and Moraga was one of the 10 basket courses in the country." Since then, Beernink says that the number of courses grew to 1596 in 2003 and more than 3000 in 2010. Outside of Moraga, the nearest courses are located in San Francisco, Berkeley, San Leandro and San Ramon.

At the council meeting the players took turn pleading during the public comment period. Residents from Oakland, Sonoma, Canyon and Lafayette took the stand, explaining that the low impact sport is great for all ages and abilities, is inexpensive and has become a destination for many. Finally, Brian Henderson of Moraga took the stand. "I am one of those players who are out there with their families," said Henderson, "I have six kids and the game is one of the only things that I can get all of them to do together at the park, from the youngest (twins) who are five-years old to my oldest who are practicing their skills with their friends."

Since the topic was not on the agenda, the Council could not comment on the matter. But when contacted after the meeting Town Manager Mike Segrest confirmed that the town had no intention of eliminating the disc golf course. "There is an understanding between the players and the Town, but the land belongs to Moraga," said Segrest, "over time the course has been changed and reconfigured and it could happen again as we try to accommodate all activities for our residents." Jay Ingram, Moraga's Parks and Recreation Director, would like the resources to conduct a comprehensive Moraga Commons plan. "We haven't been able to get a 'go' from the Town because we do not have the budget to do the study," says the Director, "but this is clearly something that is a requirement of our Parks and Recreation master plan." The Director has met more than once with the disk golf players to discuss recreation opportunities. His goal includes beginner disc golf classes for residents of all ages.

Beernink said that his group is ready to volunteer to provide classes or even organize a tournament that would benefit the Town's choice of charities. He remains concerned about the future of his favorite sport in Moraga. "Removing some holes would mean that the course would disappear," says Beernink, "this has become a significant part of so many people's lives for so many years; we would be very disappointed to see it disappear."

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