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## Randy Bennett Talks to Moraga Movers

By Lou Fancher



From left: Randy Bennett, Phil and Gretchen Arth  
Photo Lou Fancher

caused the booming attendance. Formerly known as the Moraga Hacienda Seniors, the Fishers and other members realized the group needed a "marketing mindset."

During a meeting with a Moraga Parks and Recreation official, Julie came up with the name. "It was just alliteration: Moraga Mmmm... Movers!" she said, recalling the moment. With a new moniker, and George's knack for making every person he meets feel like family, Moraga Movers was on its way.

Phil Arth, the outgoing president of the group, explained why he will step aside for incoming president Bob Foxall. "I'm going to be the Grand Poo-bah of SIR (Sons in Retirement)," Arth jokes, "so next year I'll only have to find speakers for one group, instead of two."

"We encourage term limits," George said. "We want an influx of new people with new ideas."

The speaker on November 8th was the perfect finale to Arth's term. "Randy (Bennett) lives across the street from me," Arth said. "I left a message in his mailbox-didn't even put a stamp on it-asking if he'd speak to the group. He's an engaging speaker and everybody in Moraga's interested in the Gael's and what their prospects are for the next season."

Indeed, Bennett had a rapt audience as he reflected on his 10 years at the college and what he hopes to achieve going forward.

If numbers tell a story, then certainly, Bennett's numbers describe success as a college coach. Season ticket holders were at 180 when he arrived. Today, he said, they number a couple of thousand. The team is 46-4 in the home court. ESPN will broadcast 10-13 of the Gael's games this season: ten years ago, none of the games were televised.

And, there's the Sweet 16.

The tournament has set the bar for Bennett and his players. "All our focus is to prepare ourselves to get in that tournament," he said. "Last time, we were the slowest team in the country, but this year we're quick-and grittier on defense. Every game matters."

In 2009, Bennett said he had a great group of guys, both players and assistants. He described them as "selfless," calling special attention to Omar Samhan and Ben Allen. "Allen was willing to sacrifice personal moments to do the right thing for the team," he said. "Omar, he never gave up. Any time a NBA person came to watch another player, he'd ask, 'What can I do to be an NBA player?'"

The Gael team is not about building stars, according to the coach. "I'm not into the star deal," he said, answering a question from the audience. "We want our guys to be pros, but not over the good of the team. We teach them: appreciate what you have and give back. At the Special Olympics camp recently, when we walked away, we were thinking, those kids gave something to us."

Bennett said the team trained hard over the summer and that 6 of the 8 players from last year have returned. "More than all that, we've had an experience you can't simulate: we've been to The Tournament."

Saint Mary's College basketball players aren't the only people with some hustle in the town of Moraga. The Moraga Movers, a 35-year-old club for residents age 55 and older, has picked up the ball and plans to run with it.

"At one point, there were 500 members," said Julie Fisher, a member and wife of former Moraga Mover's President George Fisher.

"In 2006, our members dropped below 200," George said, describing in dark tones the lowest point in the group's history.

On November 8th, 2010, at a sold-out luncheon held on the Saint Mary's College campus and featuring guest speaker Randy Bennett, the head men's basketball coach, it was hard to believe. The group stands at 423 members and has a full roster of events; from bocce to book clubs, and from Panama Canal cruises to day-excursions to Napa wineries.

In their spare time, Moraga Movers support the New Rheem Theatre, volunteer at local events, and hold monthly luncheons.

"It was the name change," George says, when asked what has

Recruiting is a job skill Bennett handles with finesse. He has found players in Australia, where the Australian Institute of Sport exposes the best young athletes to rigorous training. "They don't know the difference between Saint Mary's and UCLA, and we don't tell them," Bennett said, getting the biggest laugh of the day.

There's no joking when it comes to his answers about graduation rates and Gonzaga. He said he tells players not to come to Saint Mary's if they're not interested in getting a degree. The program boasts 30 graduates out of 35 during his tenure. And Gonzaga? "They'll be up for us this year. I don't think they like the way that one ended last year."

A year from now, if the Gael's get a sweet repeat of last season, and if the Moraga Movers' ambitious, energized membership continues its rapid expansion, they may need to hold the November luncheon in a larger venue. Perhaps the McKeon Pavilion Gym?

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