

Published December 8th, 2010

Festival of Trees Nearly Falls

By Sophie Braccini



Dianne Wilson with her dog Ranger Photo Ohlen Alexander

Dianne Wilson couldn't help but feel proud at the sight of seven decorated Christmas trees, ready to be auctioned, in the side lobby of Moraga Royale. The Festival of Trees fundraising event that Wilson, the Executive Director of the assisted living facility, started planning last July almost didn't happen - three days before the opening date most of her corporate sponsors bailed out.

Accomplishing a real tour-de-force, supported by staff, residents and their families, as well as two remaining sponsors (CVS Pharmacy and Hospice of the East Bay), Wilson managed to get all of her trees decorated and generously complete with gifts. The silent auction started on December 1st closed on December 7th. All proceeds will go to the Rescue One Foundation, the organization that supports Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) paramedics.

"MOFD comes here twice a month on average," explains Wilson, "they are always very professional and kind, and their equipment, some of which was purchased with Rescue One donations, saves lives." State law requires that the facility call them if a resident falls and bumps his/her head, even if it is a minor fall. Every time it happens, Wilson says, she gets the same graciousness and quality of service from MOFD.

"We are doing this for our residents, too," adds Wilson, "they enjoyed the whole process as well as coming here and seeing the trees." Wilson explains that some of the older residents do not feel confident venturing outside of the grounds and really appreciate activities and new entertainment on site.

Moraga Royale, a retirement community of over 80 residents, is located at the corner of Country Club Drive and Canyon. About 18 of the patients are part of the dementia unit that's separate from the rest of the grounds. "We take these residents for a visit to the trees every day," says Wilson, "and they enjoy it every time."

It was the first time that such an auction was organized in Moraga. "I feel that this is only a beginning and that this fundraising event has the potential to become bigger and maybe include a dinner and/or a fashion show," says Wilson. For a first time, the display was quite impressive. Wilson added a 'donation boot' from MOFD where visitors could just contribute a few dollars to their favorite fire department.

Reflecting on what happened with the donors that fell short of their promises, Wilson concluded, "It's like what is happening in the world, it's the small, local people that are making it happen."



Photo Ohlen Alexander

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