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Wednesday, December 22, 2010



Practicing happiness: The O'Donnell family — Michael, Kathryn, Brendan (15), Julian (11), Audrey (14) and Mikey (8) — clowns around while enjoying a rousing game of Lafayetteopoly (just released by Lafayette Partners in Education - see ad page L3). Photo Doug Kohen

The Science of Happiness

By Lou Fancher

Happiness.

*Thomas Jefferson told us to pursue it.
Mark Twain warned us it could not be combined with sanity.
Helen Keller directed us to find it in "fidelity to a worthy purpose."
And last month, thousands scurried to barely-morning retail openings in hopes of buying it on Black Friday.*

At the University of California, Berkeley, happiness is such an important topic, there's an entire department devoted to studying it: the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC).

Advertising

Christine Carter, a sociologist and director of the GGSC parenting program, grew up in Orinda. She moved to the area in the late 1970's and attended Wagner Ranch Elementary School and Orinda Intermediate School.

Her parents, Tim and Sylvia Carter still live in Orinda.

"My parents are very involved with my girls. Not only will I be coming home for the holidays, I have dinner there at least once a week. I'm a working single mother, but I don't even feel that single because my parents are so involved. They've built a separate club house for my kids. Orinda is like Disneyland to them," she said, laughing.

... continued on page A11

Quote of the Week:

"Can't we as a community acknowledge this problem and agree that we can do better?"

Read Letters to the Editor, page A12

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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City Receives Free Money for Sidewalk Beautification

By Cathy Tyson

Who doesn't like to get something on sale? With a huge boost from a federal grant - brick paving, street furniture, decorative planters, stylish street lights, public art, bike racks and trash cans will beautify a portion of Mt. Diablo Boulevard for a fraction of the cost.

As part of the 2010 Capital Improvement Program, \$350,000 from the Downtown Street Lights Replacement Reserve was allocated to implement the Downtown Street Improvements Master Plan—to spruce up just one block along Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Seeking to leverage city funds, staff applied for and received a \$1,290,000 federal grant that would

fund the entire Master Plan from Oak Hill Road all the way to Mt. View/Dolores Drive.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said new mayor Carl Anduri.

Streetscape architect Sudhish Mohindroo, a partner in SZFM Design Studio that worked on the Lafayette Mercantile Building and the renovation of La Fiesta Square, is the architect of the project. A preliminary design was presented to the City Council on December 13. Looking to gain acceptance of general design concepts and get clarification on two major issues was the focus of the presentation. ... continued on page A2

Secret Snowflake – Kids Giving to Kids

By Lee Borrowman

Christmas came a few days early for students at Concord's Cambridge Elementary School, courtesy of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School's Secret Snowflake program. At least 700 new toys were donated this year by the Moraga school's students, families and friends—the gifts were wrapped and brought to Cambridge last Friday as students gleefully headed into the long winter break.

Two days before the donation deadline, however, it looked as if there would not be enough toys for all of the Cambridge students, the vast majority of whom come from low-income families.

Joaquin Moraga (JM) math teacher Brett Lorie, who has spearheaded the Secret Snowflake program for nine years with fellow teacher Jerry Gruen, says they usually collect about 750 toys each December. But in this economically challenging year, "It took us longer to hit our goal; it seems as if fewer kids brought in gifts, but those that did brought in more gifts on average."

A desperate plea went out two days before the donation deadline, spreading virally at the hands of supportive JM teachers and staff. Only 300 toys had been donated; the youngest Cambridge students would receive gifts, but the older ones might not unless more toys marched through JM's doors. ... continued on page L10

Decorating for the Holidays—Just Do It

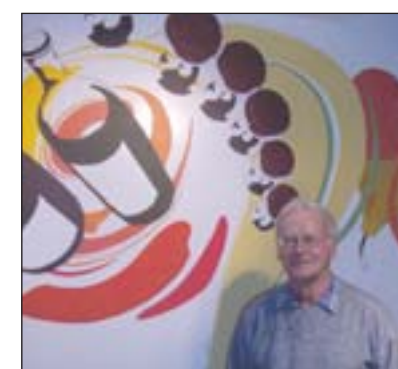


By Andrea A. Firth

For Nikolene Isely, decorating for the holidays is a joy not a chore. "Making your home festive for the holidays is a creative process," says Isely, the owner of Staging by Design in Moraga. "It's important to be spontaneous and to try something new. That's what makes it fun."

... read on page L1

Meet The Elusive Immigrant



By Lou Fancher

Meeting with an accountant normally doesn't leave a person gasping for air—except perhaps, when contemplating the wide berth between one's ways and one's means—but interviewing John Benzie, retired accountant and Orinda author, is breathtaking.

... read on page L4

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Lafayette

Public Meetings

City Council Monday, January 10, 7:00 pm
Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd

Planning Commission Monday, January 3, 7:00 pm
(scheduled meeting on December 20 has been canceled)
Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd

Design Review Monday, January 10, 7:00 pm
Lafayette Library & Learning Center in the Arts & Science Discovery Center at 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements
City of Lafayette: www.ci.lafayette.ca.us
Chamber of Commerce: www.lafayettechamber.org

Police Report



Never a lender nor a borrower be, 12/4/10 Lafayette police responded to the report of a stolen rental car. Apparently, the accused took the 1960's jingle "Let Hertz put you in the driver's seat" literally. The victim (and police) didn't appreciate the "borrower" not returning inquiry phone calls.

'Tis the Season, 12/5/10 A Petar's customer punched another customer in the face in the wee hours of December 5. How very unusual! The puncher, who was shorter and weighed less than the punch-ee, was feeling his oats; while the punch-ee was

feeling the pain. Puncher was placed under citizen's arrest.

Was it something I said? 12/4/10 Just hours before, at that very same establishment, a short woman hit a tall man in the face with a glass. The man declined medical attention and declined to press charges. Maybe she was drinking p.i.n.k. vodka and wanted him to see the world through rose-colored glass(es).

All I want for Christmas... 12/10/10 Two robbers hit employees and customers with pepper spray, then snatched a Play Station 3 game console from Radio Shack and fled the scene by car (only to play Grand Theft Auto later?). The victims were treated and released.

Homeowner Planning to Appeal Addition Decision

By Cathy Tyson



The Polichio family in front of their Burton Valley home. Photo Cathy Tyson

Burton Valley homeowners Joe and Noelle Polichio refuse to take no for an answer. They are appealing a decision of the Planning Commission that does not allow them to build a second story addition to their Lucas Drive home.

It's been a roller coaster for the family. The Design Review Commission considered the project at a number of meetings, and on September 13, conditionally approved it after some modifications were made. Then in October, neighbors William Wahlander and John Woolery appealed that decision to the Planning Commission.

The Planning Commission heard the matter twice and directed the applicants to make significant

changes to reduce the size of the project. The latest version was downsized by 189 feet, but since the process began the project has shrunk by 31% from 1,580 square feet for the second story addition to 1,084 square feet. The majority of Commissioners at the third meeting felt it still wasn't enough.

Joe Polichio describes his frustration, "This is a property rights issue. The City is disregarding its own guidelines." Noelle adds, "I wish the opposition could recognize that we love our beautiful Burton Valley neighborhood just as much as they do, and we're just trying to add to the existing charm of the neighborhood while accommodating our growing family." She

points out that there are five two-story homes on Lucas Drive.

The Polichios figure they are committed to the project, "it makes sense to see it through." Indeed they have paid for their architect to prepare several iterations of the project and recently hired an attorney to go to bat for them.

With a lot constrained by trees, the only way to go is up. Since they have two small children, they wanted all of the bedrooms together on the second floor.

"The major issue is compatibility," said William Wahlander, who opposes the project and lives adjacent to the home, at the third meeting of the Planning Commission to review the project. The trouble is "compatible" can mean different things to different people. Wahlander also noted the average size of homes in the immediate neighborhood is substantially smaller than the proposed addition.

From the beginning, city staff agreed with the homeowner and architect: "In staff's opinion, the applicant has made extremely significant modifications....staff recommends conditionally approving the project."

Unfortunately for the homeowner, ultimate approval is not up to staff, but rather the Planning Commission. However even its decision can be appealed to the City Council.

Attorney David Bowie, representing the applicant, argued that the home is compatible, explaining that notices of the hearing were sent to homes within a 300 foot radius as required; within this area are a number of two-story and split level homes. He also pointed out that the size of the home is consistent with objective City requirements and there is no

regulation that says you have to make your home average size.

He concluded that, "Homogeneity is not the standard here," unlike the cookie cutter developments of Brentwood and Antioch.

Architect Ken Hertel was, "saddened that Wahlander doesn't see all the changes - there is significantly reduced mass and appearance." He said there are five recently approved second story additions in Lafayette - and they are all next to single story homes.

Comments from the audience included a chorus of complaints about "ambiguous standards" that will affect potential buyers and create a ceiling on property values. A number of speakers cited young families, attracted to the quiet neighborhood and good schools of Burton Valley, who should have the opportunity to expand their homes.

One gentleman commented that he was, "Frankly shocked they are going through this agony. It's a tasteful design....times have changed since the 1950's."

A Walnut Creek resident who is shopping for a home is Burton Valley commented that second stories in Lafayette are allowed - but not allowed here. Now she is reluctant to consider buying a fixer-upper. Another fellow called it a, "Quasi-historical preservation zone - without the official title."

Oddly enough also on the evening's agenda was a new 5,000 square foot home on Reliez Valley Court, and an 8,450 home on the site of a demolished 2,200 square foot property on Canyon Road. The difference in both cases is the proposed homes are on larger lots, both over an acre, and tucked away from neighbors.

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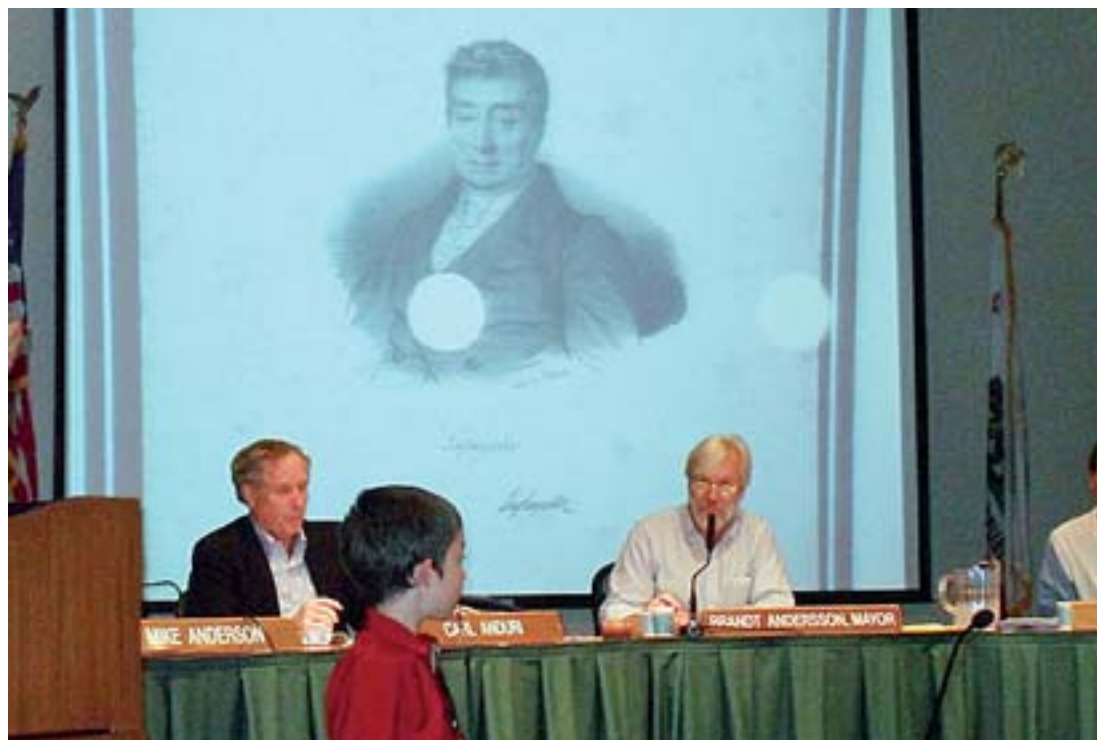
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The Marquis Comes to Town

By Cathy Tyson



Portrait of Marie Joseph du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette (foreground: Noah Sonet) Photo Cathy Tyson

Thanks to the kindness of Gilbert Sonet, a portrait of the Marquis de LaFayette will now reside in Lafayette. Although the City has a statue of the Marquis near Plaza Park, this is the first framed version of the handsome French aristocrat.

While on vacation in France, Sonet came across the local version of a garage sale on a street in Paris with a portrait of Marie Joseph du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette by artist Francois Seraphin Delpech circa 1830. He purchased it, brought the image home in his

luggage, and had it framed.

With charming son Noah, they graciously presented the framed portrait at a recent City Council meeting as a token of appreciation for the generosity the City has shown the Lamorinda Petanque Club. It will be placed in

the Lafayette Library and Learning Center sometime in January.

"I'll echo Carol Federighi in saying that it is great that the first gift of artwork to Lafayette is a portrait of Lafayette. We all appreciate the thoughtfulness of Gilbert and Noah to bring the portrait back from France in honor of their hometown," said Ann Merideth, Community Development Director.

Sonet enjoys the story of the Marquis and believes it's inspirational. A French aristocrat, LaFayette became so inspired by the ideals of the American Revolution that he journeyed overseas and volunteered his military skills. A rich fellow, he could have stayed home and done what was expected of him and lead a life of leisure, but he sought adventure. The young Frenchman became a loyal confidant of George Washington, with whom he shared the hardships of the long winter at Valley Forge. After the American victory, he returned to France - but eventually came back to America where he was hailed as a hero.

City Receives Free Money for Sidewalk Beautification

... continued from page A1

Mohindroo analyzed the existing conditions and constraints, looking to optimize improvements without negative impacts to make the project pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

The plan is not complete at the moment, detailed architectural and design work still needs to be done. February 1, 2011, is the deadline to submit a construction authorization request package to the State, or the grant money is at risk. Although there have been complaints by the public about the speed of the process

- this deadline has been the driver of the schedule.

One of the challenging issues is the many driveways - five - and the general layout of the parking lot at the Trader Joe's / Diablo Foods shopping center. This and a proposed u-turn restriction at Happy Valley Road are the main issues of contention on the project. Because "bulb outs" - an extended portion of the corners at the Happy Valley intersection, to accommodate pedestrians - would spill out onto the street, this makes the available

road real estate necessary to negotiate a u-turn impossible.

Bill Eames - former owner of Bills Drugs, now CVS, and Dan Stokes of Diablo Foods shook hands and agreed to look into a parking lot study, hopefully with other merchants on board, to get a better handle on circulation and parking in arguably one of the most congested lots in Lafayette.

After much public comment encouraging the City Council to keep the u-turn, a decision was made to go ahead with the

planning of the project but to consider the u-turn and parking lot issues separately.

Shopping center owners and merchants also hope to have a plan prior to the next City Council meeting in January.

Council members also discussed the pros and cons of a low stone wall, a hedge or a skinny iron fence with some kind of vine or greenery to separate pedestrians from the parking lot. No decision was made, but they did agree to get further information on materials options.

Carl Anduri: Mayor for 2011

By Cathy Tyson



Carl Anduri was appointed mayor for 2011 at the final Lafayette City Council meeting of the year. He thanked his family and the City Council for the great privilege and pleasure of serving and enjoyed cupcakes with his constituents. Carol Federighi will be vice-mayor in 2011.

Anduri sees roads as Lafayette's main concern: "I hope we can all agree this is our biggest priority, and now is the time to solve the problem." Look for a Meet the Mayor story in early January that will spell out his agenda.

Photo Cathy Tyson

This Year's Mayor and a Council Member Say Goodbye and Hello

By Cathy Tyson



Council members Don Tatzin and Brandt Andersson

Photo Cathy Tyson

Both Brandt Andersson and Don Tatzin won re-election; Andersson steps down as mayor, but returns to the City Council with Don Tatzin, a council member since 1985.

New Mayor Carl Anduri introduced former Mayor Brant Andersson, saying he was particularly good at bringing order to chaos. Anduri recognized the importance of the acquisition of the Acalanes Ridge Open Space as one of the hallmarks of Andersson's tenure.

"It's been a real pleasure –

time well spent. The Mayor gets credit for what a lot of other people do," said Andersson. He recognized and thanked his family and city staff for all that they accomplish along with citizens who fill up the Community Hall every other Monday trying to make the city a better place.

Andersson credits much of the success this year to planning, "Acalanes Ridge didn't just happen – the City gained a beautiful open space for a quarter of the cost with a coalition of Muir Heritage

Land Trust, East Bay Regional Park District and the City of Walnut Creek."

"Winning is a lot better than the alternative," said Don Tatzin, who will continue his record-breaking quarter century position on the City Council. He estimates he visited 1,000 homes in the area, knocking on doors to ask voters for their support. Looking forward he envisions, "Continued periods of uncertainty and we will continue to be in a weak economic environment."

Downtown Plan Ready for Action in Spring

By Cathy Tyson

Calling the last two workshops on the Shield Block and Golden Gate Way, "fruitful and productive," the Lafayette Planning Commission is looking forward to taking action in the New Year. "We should be ready to get on with it," said the chair of the Planning Commission, Tom Chastain, referring to the proposed framework for growth in the downtown for the next twenty years, also known as the Revised Draft Downtown Specific Plan.

Working on this project

since December 2006, Planning Commissioners, who volunteer their time, are understandably exhausted with this topic. Now the workshops are completed, the economic and fiscal analysis and the Draft Environmental Impact Report are done – the Revised Draft Downtown Specific Plan is slowly lumbering into the home stretch.

In the spring, look for the Planning Commission to review major issues, economics and plan implementation, along with goals,

policies and programs. A public review of the revised Draft Specific Plan is slated for April. Public hearings on the Final Environmental Impact Report and revised Draft Specific Plan are tentatively scheduled for May. The City Council public hearing will be in June.

Look for comments and photos from the Workshops on the city website. All the documents to date are also available at www.lovelafayette.org under the subhead Downtown Specific Plan and EIR.

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Happy New Year!



I had many blessings in 2010 with wonderful clients and friends and a loving family.


Best wishes to all for a healthy and prosperous 2011!



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Civic News Moraga

Public Meetings	
Town Council	Wednesday, January 12, 7:30 pm Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, 1010 Camino Pablo
Planning Commission	Monday, January 3, 7:30 pm Moraga Library, 1500 Saint Marys Rd
Design Review	Monday, January 24, 7:00 pm Moraga Library, 1500 Saint Marys Rd <i>Monday, January 10, has been canceled</i>
Liaison	Friday, January 14, 8:00 am Fire Station, 1280 Moraga Way

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements
 Town of Moraga online: www.moraga.ca.us
 Chamber of Commerce: www.moragachamber.org
 Moraga Citizens' Network: www.moragacitizensnetwork.org

Police Report



Christmas vandalism, 12/13/10 Some Grinch entered the front yard of a Moraga Road homeowner and cut the electric cords to a sign that read, "Happy Birthday Jesus." Homeowner had no idea who would do this, hadn't seen anyone suspicious in the area, and mentioned to the officer that this has happened before. Reported loss, \$30.

Teen driver vs. PG & E pole, 12/15/10 At the corner of Scofield Drive and Rheem Blvd. a 16-year-old driver ran off the roadway and struck a PG & E pole. Moderate damage to car – minor damage to pole. Mom and Dad were notified and the car was towed from the scene.

Computer vanished, 12/11/10 A gentleman left his Sony Vaio notebook computer on a bench in front of Mountain Mike's pizza. The fellow went home forgetting he left it; he returned the next day at the crack of noon and found it missing. Both the computer and its bag are valued at \$779.

Annoying phone calls, 12/14/10 One fellow was making annoying calls to his brother, even after he asked him to stop. The nerve! Officers attempted to reach the pesky caller by phone, but were unsuccessful.



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Moraga's New Town Council

By Sophie Braccini



Photo Clay Serrahn

As the November election results were certified during the December 8th Town Council meeting, Moraga got itself a new Council that very much resembles the old one. To no one's surprise, Council Member Karen Mendonca succeeds Ken Chew as Mayor, and Mike Metcalf will now sit in the Vice-Mayor's seat. Although the Moraga Town Council was once known for its acrimonious meetings, the gracious statements made by each council member suggest that this Council will be one of Moraga's most civil.

The Council rallied around Mendonca to wish her well as she stepped up to the Mayor-ship. Howard Harpham, who could not be present that evening, sent a letter that summarized the Council's consensus. "I support incoming Mayor Karen Mendonca... (and) am looking forward to working closely with (her) to accomplish even more in 2011," he wrote, "Karen has demonstrated that she thinks clearly and holds the interest of the Town at heart."

Chew delivered a short and good-humored address. "It's been the opportunity of a life time," he said, "I enjoyed every moment of it." He particularly thanked staff members for their support, adding that he was "just the guy in the picture," while they do all the hard

work. Mendonca presented him with a framed gavel as a keepsake.

Vice-Mayor Metcalf congratulated Mendonca, "I think that you are going to be a terrific Mayor," he said. Metcalf encouraged new Town Manager Jill Keimach to continue the momentum of reforms begun by the previous Manager, and placed a high emphasis on the economic revitalization of the Town.

In her initial address, Mendonca detailed her priorities for the coming year (see side bar). Like Chew, she acknowledged staff and the many Moraga volunteers who serve in roles that are held by paid staff in wealthier local governments.

Moraga's frugality allows the Town to have a balanced operational budget, but does not provide for needed infrastructure maintenance. Finding new sources of revenue to tackle that difficult issue will be one of the new Mayor's top priorities.

Mayor Karen Mendonca's 15 Goals for 2011

Fiscal

- Develop and implement a balanced budget
- Establish a 5-year financial strategy plan
- Increase the general fund balance/reserve to 50% (now at 43%) of the Operating Budget
- Increase outside funding and grants for streets and storm drain improvements

Economic Development / Environment

- Work with the economic development team to help create a streamlined business approval process
- Outreach with the community to identify its priority for infrastructure investment and economic development
- Create a vision for the Rheem Center with the community
- Establish a task force to begin a climate change action plan or greenhouse reduction strategy (AB 32)

Building Project/Partnering

- 329 Rheem : finish retrofit design, planning , bid, start building
- Camino Pablo field, work to be completed in summer 2011
- Partner with SMC on student housing, recreation, sesquicentennial celebration, and support their effort to host a presidential debate in 2012
- Partner with the New Rheem Theatre, teen dances and California Independent Film Festival.

Communication

- Redesign the web site to expand its audience.
- Web streaming or videotaping of Council Meetings
- Continue and enhance a consistent practice of civility in public meeting

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Goal Setting Session in Moraga

Residents encouraged to attend and share thoughts
 By Sophie Braccini

On Saturday, January 8, 2011, the Moraga Town Council and staff will spend their Saturday morning, from 8 a.m. to noon, at the Hacienda de las Flores listing and prioritizing their goals for the Town in 2011. Residents who have an interest in the future of their town are encouraged to come to the meeting and weigh-in on the choice of topics and how they are prioritized.

Although there will clearly be other issues addressed during the year, the sketching of a road map is essential to long term management. As residents opposed to the Dollar Tree coming to town put it, "The Council is there to enact the will of the people;" the elected members need to hear the voice of the people as they engage the Moraga Town-ship on the 2011 path.

A town is like a heavy boat, guided by a whole network of legal obligations. It is very difficult to make a sharp turn without tearing the delicate web. Getting somewhere requires a compass and a destination; this is why these sessions are organized once a year. Not only will the Town's objectives for the year be set, but they will be prioritized in order of importance.

Moraga reporter Sophie Braccini recommends that a good place for interested residents to start is with the list of goals drafted by Moraga's new mayor, Karen Mendonca (see above). Braccini suggests the following approach:

- Ask yourself if what you want to see happen in town is listed (or a variation thereof).
- Detail the goals you'd like to see achieved and list your own priorities (it can be helpful to include other like-minded residents who will also attend the Saturday meeting.)
- Prepare your arguments, and divide them into 3-minute sound bites that each person in your group will present.



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Santa Visits Moraga Residents

By Sophie Braccini



Rich Larsen and his five grand children: Mikayla Smith (age 8), Nathan (5) & Spencer (2) Bennett, and Jocelyn (1) & Sloane (5 months) Larsen
Photo Sophie Braccini

On December 16, Rich and Carol Larsen had their children and five grandchildren, ages five months to eight years old, over for a pre-Christmas celebration in their Country Club home.

About 6:30 p.m. the doorbell rang. When the children opened the door they came face to face with Santa Claus. The jolly old elf shared drinks and sweets with the families and took notes as the kids detailed their Christmas wish-lists.

"He was the real Santa, I tugged on his beard to be sure," said one of the children, while his cousin hoped that Santa would come back on Christmas Eve with more presents.

The special visit was arranged by Rich Larson's step-daughter, Carrie Smith, an Orinda resident who had heard about the Moraga Parks and Recreation Department's pact with the North Pole. "It is a wonderful idea," said Larsen, "it was a very special moment for our family."

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MCN Thanks Town Staff



Photo Andy Schreck

Ellen Beans, President of the Moraga Citizens Network (MCN), believes 'tis the season not only to celebrate, but to give and thank as well. On December 17, with MCN members Janet Foreman and Darleen Haffner, she organized a festive celebration for Moraga Town Staff, who, in her experience, give much to the

Town. "This was a significant community experience, said Beans, "we held it in the Fireside Room at the Hacienda, all the food was home-made by MCN members, and we had the great addition of flutist Carol Alban, from The Friends of Moraga Library, with her accompanist, who played wonderful music." As staff

members introduced themselves, Police Chief Bob Priebe said that the day marked the 31st anniversary of his coming to Moraga. "In all these years I can't remember a time when the community has given back so abundantly to us," said Priebe, "it was worth waiting for." S.Braccini

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Camino Pablo Field's Restoration Design

By Sophie Braccini

The Moraga Town Council authorized staff to enter into an agreement with Callander Associates, of San Mateo, for a not-to-exceed amount of \$65,000 for the design of the Camino Pablo Elementary School Field Renovation Project. This project will cost the Town approximately \$730,000, and utilizes East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) Measure WW funds.

Jill Mercurio, Moraga's Public Works Director/Town Engineer, indicated that the selected design firm came to the interview with very good ideas, and had obviously studied the existing topography. Like other bidders, they have experience in the type of public work they will provide in Moraga.

The Town worked with the School District to select a design. Bruce Burns, the Superintendent of the Moraga

School District, expressed his satisfaction with the collaborative process at a December 10th meeting.

Successfully restoring a field that belongs to the School District with Town money demonstrates significant improvement in the relationship between Moraga's two main public agencies. Both the Town and the school district suffer from budget reductions and these financial tensions have translated in the past to lengthy disputes over who should pay, and how much, for the cost of maintaining school district facilities such as gyms and sports fields that are used for community sports and events.

The design should be completed in early 2011; the bidding for the actual work will happen this spring; and construction should proceed over the summer.



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Civic News

Orinda

Public Meetings

City Council Tuesday, January 4, 7:00 pm
Auditorium, Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way

Planning Commission Tuesday, January 11, 7:00 pm
Auditorium, Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements
City of Orinda: www.cityoforinda.org
Chamber of Commerce: www.orindachamber.org

Police Report

ORINDA POLICE

of alcohol intoxication. Turns out she was driving under a suspended license and was on probation for another D.U.I. incident.

High on more than life, 12/15/10 A car was stopped after midnight at the Orinda exit off of Highway 24 for expired registration tags. The officer on duty noticed that the driver displayed signs of being under a "central nervous system stimulant." A phlebotomist was called in at the late hour to draw blood. Mr. Giddy was taken to the detention facility in Martinez.

Accident + D.U.I., 12/15/10 A busy Wednesday night for the cops – a middle aged female was involved in a collision on El Camino Moraga and fled the scene. Police found her in her car parked in her driveway with a bottle of wine in her hand. Oddly enough, she displayed symptoms

Mystery man robber, 12/15/10 The manager on duty spied an unknown man in the back office of the True Value Hardware store. While he called the cops, the mystery man disappeared along with \$474.00 in a bank bag. No one saw his stealthy get away.

Vandalism, 12/11/10 Sometime during the night an unknown suspect smashed the front window of a car parked in a Muth Drive driveway. Nothing was taken from the car – but there was \$150 in damage. Can't win – even with nothing in sight. Short of wrapping your car in plastic or barbed wire, what's a car owner supposed to do?



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Orinda's Council Gets a New Member and a New Mayor

By Andrea A. Firth



Council Member Victoria Smith presented outgoing Mayor Tom McCormick with his gavel. Photo Ohlen Alexander

At the December 7th City Council meeting, outgoing Council member and former Mayor Tom McCormick was recognized for his service on the Council over the past four years. As Council Members Victoria Smith, Amy Worth, Sue Severson, and Steve Glazer gently teased McCormick about his adroit use of the Mayor's gavel, they also commended his hard work on programs for the youth of the City and the streamlining of the planning process. McCormick said he truly enjoyed his time on the Council and that he was looking forward to having more time to spend with his four children.

The meeting quickly moved on to the installation of three new Council members: incumbents Amy Worth and Sue Severson, who placed first and second in votes counted in the November election, and new Council member Dean Orr. Orr had been the Chair of the Planning Commission; Louise Adamson will step into that role. The new Council then elected Victoria Smith to serve as Mayor, her second time in this post, and Steve Glazer as Vice Mayor.

Mayor Smith's outlook for the upcoming year in Orinda was confident yet sobering. Smith noted that the ongoing recession and the flat-lining of the City's tax revenues would continue to present financial challenges in the next year. As far as repairing Orinda's crumbling roads, with the limited funds available Smith acknowledged, "We have not been able to [fully] address this." Regarding the downtown development process, she stated that the Council was committed to continuing a two-way dialogue with the citizenry. And in closing, Smith invoked the lyrics of the song *I've Got to Use My Imagination*, by Gladys Knight & the Pips, and stated, "We gotta keep on keeping on."

Downtown Visioning—Round 2

By Andrea A. Firth

About 80 residents recently attended the second downtown development workshop sponsored by the City and aimed at getting community input to create a vision for the future of Orinda's commercial districts. Although not quite the size crowd that gathered for the first workshop held in October, a similar debate over if, what, and how to change Orinda's downtown ensued.

Some residents challenged the need and viability of the downtown "revitalization" concept. "Orinda is a place where I live. It's a bedroom community. Retail is less important, I'm not really sure that I want [downtown] to be vital," said one woman. Another added, "Retail and semi-rural is an oxymoron."

Yet others lamented that Orinda's commercial districts are tired and provide limited retail, restaurant, and service options. "Celebrated, well-used, vital retail may be a possibility for Orinda. Don't avoid this because you fear something awful could happen," stated one gentleman.

The something awful for one faction of the audience was the idea of raising the building height from the current 35-foot limit to 55-feet as proposed by the City task force that drafted recommendations for the downtown planning process. A supporter of the building height status quo called for any increase in height to be placed before the voters in a city-wide referendum. But others found the argument against increased building height, specifically 55 feet, arbitrary and unclear. They identified the need for more information and visual aids to show what a 55-foot tall building looks like in various parts of the City.

It's unlikely that any change will come soon. "We are in the first stage of gathering input, and we will continue these workshops to collect input from all sectors of the community," said Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu as he outlined the process, which could take as long as two years. "We will use the community's vision to update the City's General Plan," added Ursu. "The General Plan is a long-term document, but it needs to evolve as the residents' views change over time," he stated, noting that the last comprehensive update to the plan was done in 1987.

Orinda Motors Recognized for Philanthropy



Photo Ohlen Alexander

The owners of Orinda Motors, Allen and Terry Pennebaker, were recently recognized for their many philanthropic contributions to the City. In addition to the major support Orinda Motors provides to the annual car show each September, it also supports a number of other community events and causes and hosts a plethora of carwash fundraisers annually. Allen, who purchased the business with his wife in 1996, also recognized his longtime Service Manager John Vanek, who has been integral to making Orinda Motors' strong community connection happen. Pictured (from L to R) Terry Pennebaker, Allen Pennebaker, and Council Member Amy Worth.

Based on the input from both workshops, one point of consensus among residents is the desire for a vibrant, sustainable retail environment in the downtown districts according to workshop facilitator, Chris Beynon of MIG in Berkeley. However, opinions diverged as to whether this is best achieved through new development or by supporting existing businesses, and residents were also divided on the type of retail they want.

How to overcome the BART/freeway barrier between The Crossroads and Orinda Village to create a more connected downtown also sparked a lot of discussion.

"There is no plan," said Beynon in closing. "What you are doing here is building the plan."

Next Up in the Library Gallery—New Images of Old Orinda

By Andrea A. Firth



Orinda Park School, Group Portrait, 1900.

Photo courtesy of the Orinda Historical Society

The Orinda Library Gallery will showcase over twenty images of Orinda from the early 1900's as part of the exhibit New Images of Old Orinda – 1901 to 1920's sponsored by the Orinda Historical Society (OHS). The newly discovered photos of Orinda were taken between 1901 and the mid-1920's by Edward I. deLaveaga—a prominent developer and resident of the city. The granddaughters of deLaveaga found the original glass negatives on the family's estate.

"The most striking aspect of these photos is the lack of develop-

ment and the beauty of the hills and surrounding area before the city was inhabited in any significant way," said Charlie Vollmar, Vice President of the OHS. There is also a panoramic view of the hills, digitally pieced together by OHS member Teresa Long, which gives residents a full picture of Orinda's landscape in the early twentieth century, explained Vollmar.

In addition, the Society has created a mantle-like display of photographic portraits from the same timeframe. And, the exhibit also includes photographs of the original Kennedy Tunnel and con-

struction on the first three bores of the Caldecott Tunnel. Along with these two photo collections, the OHS is also displaying artifacts from the era that are normally on display in the Society's museum.

The opening reception for the exhibit will be held on Friday, January 7th from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. Members of the Orinda Historical Society, the deLaveaga family, and

Ray Mailhot, former Superintendent of the Caldecott Tunnel, will be on hand at the reception to address questions. For more information, contact the Orinda Historical society at (925) 254-1353.

ROC Celebrates One Year



Pictured are ROC co-owners Peter McNiff (left) and Chih Fang. Photo Ohlen Alexander

The Republic of Cake, known as ROC to Orinda's cupcake-lovers, recently celebrated its one-year anniversary of business in Orinda. At the City Council's most recent meeting, ROC owner Peter McNiff told the Council Members that he had been forewarned about the curse of Theater Square. "But the clouds that had covered Theater Square seemed to break when we opened a year ago, and the sun has been shining on the place ever since," said McNiff. Over the course of the last year, ROC donated over \$8,000 of the store's proceeds to children's philanthropic causes including the Educational Foundation of Orinda (EFO). Every Monday 10% of ROC's revenues for the day are donated to EFO.

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- Parks & Recreation Commission (3)**
- Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Commission (2)**
- Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (3)**
- Finance Advisory Committee (3)**
- Art in Public Places Committee (1)**
- Public Works Aesthetic Review Committee (1)**
- Audit and Finance Committee (1)**

Effective February 2011, there will be vacancies on the Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Commission, Traffic Safety Advisory Committee, Finance Advisory Committee, and one vacancy on the Public Works Aesthetic Review Committee, Art in Public Places Committee and Audit and Finance Committee.

Statement of Interest forms are available from the Orinda City Clerk's Office, 22 Orinda Way, Orinda, CA 94563. If you have any specific questions regarding the recruitment, please contact Michele Olsen, City Clerk at 925-253-4221 or molsen@cityoforinda.org. Application forms may also be downloaded from the City's website at www.cityoforinda.org.

Completed Statement of Interest forms must be submitted to the City Clerk's Office by **Friday, January 21, 2011 at 5:00p.m.**

Qualified applicants will be invited to interview before the full City Council on **Saturday, January 29, 2011.**

Michele L. Olsen
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ART

The Lafayette Gallery presents the Heart Throb Exhibit. Show Opens Tuesday, January 4, 2011. The meet the artist's reception is 6:30-8:30pm on Friday, February 4. The current exhibit, Winter Wonderland, runs through Dec 24. Annual Holiday Gallery Hours are Tuesday - Saturday 11am- 5pm. Located 50 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette. Admission is free. For more information call (925) 284-2788 or go to www.lafayettegallery.net.

The Orinda Library Gallery will showcase over twenty images of Orinda from the early 1900's as part of the exhibit New Images of Old Orinda - 1901 to 1920's sponsored by the Orinda Historical Society (OHS). The newly discovered photos of Orinda were taken between 1901 and the mid-1920's by Edward I. deLaveaga. The opening reception for the exhibit will be held on Friday, January 7th from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. For more information, contact the Orinda Historical society at (925) 254-1353. See article page A7.

The Moraga Art Gallery ushers in a new show, 2 plus 2 = 1, shorthand for "Two Artists, Two Visions: A Singular Experience," on January 11, 2011. The exhibit brings together paintings in various media by Orinda's Beryl Glen-Reiland and watercolors by Moraga's George Ehrenhaft. An opening reception--Saturday, January 15 from 3 to 5pm will feature live music by Andrea Farrell, a classical guitarist and singer. All are invited to the Gallery located in the Rheem Shopping Center, 570 Center Street, Moraga, to eat, drink, look and listen. For more information call (925) 376-5407.

MUSIC

The Gold Coast Chamber Players present: Harmony and Melody a celebration of Black History Month. Saturday, January 29 at 7:30pm and Sunday, January 30 at 2pm. General admission is 30\$. For more information please call (925) 283-3728.

THEATER

The Saint Mary's January Term's Children's Theater presents: A staged adaptation of the classic Grimm Brothers story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Performances on Wednesday, January 26 at 7pm and Thursday, January 27 at 4pm. Where: LeFevre Theater, Saint Mary's College of California, 1928 St. Mary's Rd., Moraga. Tickets: Only \$8.00, available by calling (925) 631-4670 or e-mailing Sharon Cahill at scahill@stmarys-ca.edu.

San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival presents San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival Auditions on Jan 8, 10am-6pm; Jan 9, 10am-7pm; Jan 15, 10am-7:30pm; Jan 16, 10am-7pm, at Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Bancroft Way at Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley. More than 130 Northern California companies perform cultural dances in hopes of securing a slot in the 2011 San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival! Cost: \$10/day; Free for children 12 and under. For more info see http://www.worldartswest.org or call (415) 474-3914.

OTHER

5A's 3rd annual "Santa's Secret Wrapping Room" is free and open to the public through Dec. 24th. This decorated storage unit is set up with table, chairs, large rolls of wrapping paper, tape, ribbon - everything needed to get presents wrapped. This is especially handy if you're trying to wrap presents away from the recipient of a surprise.

Moraga Police Officers Association is collecting new or gently used stuffed animals to benefit a charity called S.A.F.E. (Stuffed Animals For Emergencies), which distributes stuffed animals to children in need. For example, S.A.F.E. provides donated stuffed animals to be stored in police cars so officers can give them to children they may encounter in any type of traumatic or tragic situation. The donated stuffed animals can be dropped off at the Moraga PD lobby at 329 Rheem Blvd. now through Jan 9.

Ewaste Collection/Fundraiser For Citizens For The Lost Society. Where: Lafayette Christian Church, 584 Glenside Drive, Lafayette When: Saturday January 15th, 2011, 9am-4pm.

Citizens For The Lost Society is committed to finding children and bring them home to our communities. Free to recycle televisions, monitors, laptops, cell phones, flatscreens & wires \$5.00 per item fee to recycle: stereos, telephones, printers, DVD players, radios, fax machines, small appliances etc. Contact (925) 890-1324 for information.

CLUBS

Lamorinda Toastmasters will be hosting an Open House and Pot Luck on Tuesday, January 4, from 7:30pm to 9pm in the Social Hall at Temple Isaiah, 3800 Mt. Diablo, Lafayette - entrance to the Temple is on Risa Road. This is a special meeting honoring the educational achievements of members Mark Darfler, Karen Lloyd, Heather Stovall, and Gordon Steele.

Sons in Retirement Lamorinda Branch 171 meets the first Wednesday monthly at Holy Trinity Cultural Center 1700 School St. Moraga. Social hour 11am, lunch 12 pm. The after lunch speaker will be Christopher Lee, a licensed

Acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist who has a practice in Walnut Creek. He will speak on how Western medicine and acupuncture work well together to optimize you and your family's health. For membership information, call Lary at (925) 631-9528.

The OML Branch of AAUW promises another outstanding program at its Jan 18 monthly meeting at the Serbian Cultural Center in Moraga at 9:30 am in presenting well-known dancer Lois Flood who has been interpreting the exquisite dances of the incomparable Isadora Duncan for over 20 years. Duncan impacted the world of dance of the early 20th Century like no other dancer. Flood performs lecture/dance programs at theaters, museums and colleges all over northern California as well as teaching master classes in NYC, Paris and San Francisco. This program is free and open to the public.

Montelindo Garden Club general meeting and speakers, third Friday of the month, September through

May. Meeting Place: Orinda Community Church, 10 Irwin Way, Orinda. Refreshments and plant and garden accessory sale at 9am meeting at 9:30, and speaker at 10:30. The meeting is free and welcomes guests and new members. Web Site: www.montelindogarden.com. email contact: montelindogarden@aol.com. On Friday, January 21, our speaker will be Laural Roaldson, owner of Laural Landscapes in Walnut Creek. Her topic is "Maximizing Your Yard Without the Lawn."

The Moraga Community Chorus needs singers from all of Lamorinda. No audition required. Our spring program will consist of a requiem selection, opera choruses and Broadway pieces. Rehearsals begin Tuesday, January 4 from 7:30-9:30pm at the Miramonte Gardens clubhouse, 1 Miramonte Way in Moraga. The chorus enjoys community service, music, and each other. For more information call Tom Marnane at 925-376-6312 or Fred Lezak at 925-376-9468 or just come and sing.

Please submit Events:
calendar@lamorindaweekly.com

The Night Before Chris Mouse Wows Pint-sized Fans

By Cathy Tyson



Kevin Menegus

Photo Andy Scheck

To the delight of a full house of toddlers, young school kids, and their parents, the Fratello Marionettes Puppet Theater presented The Night Before Chris Mouse/The North Pole Review. Ten separate puppet acts entertained young and old, each with different marionettes and holiday-themed music. From dancing kosak triplets to hula-ing Hawaiian mice to a sultry large black cat batting her eyelashes to "Santa Baby" the evening, presented by the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation, was great fun. Little ones especially enjoyed the acrobatics of teeter-totter penguins. Performers and puppet

builders Kevin Menegus and Fred C. Riley III, explained that it can take up to three months to build their custom marionettes and graciously took questions from the audience after the show. Look for additional Youth Series programs in the New Year. On January 8, The Lawrence Hall of Science presents Fizz, Pop, Wow!, and on February 12, they'll host a petting zoo of slippery frogs and bumpy toads with information about their life cycle. Go to www.lllcf.org to view the complete calendar. For more information on Fratello Marionettes, go to www.fratellom.com.

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~
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Holiday Favorites

By Susie Iventosch

This year for our holiday recipe page, we decided to ask the experts for their favorite holiday traditions. Who would know better what to serve at a festive event than our local caterers? They did not disappoint and we discovered some amazing new recipes! I think you'll enjoy each and every one of these dishes. We also tried Charlie's Beef Wellingtons with buffalo and Dianna's pork tenderloin with turkey tenderloins, and both proved to be wonderful, healthy alternatives.

Winter Clementine Dessert Salad

Darius Somary of SpringLoaf Catering likes to make a fresh and fruity, yet festive dessert at this time of the year, made with sliced Clementines, almond croquant, orange blossom infused honey, shaved chocolate and fresh mint.



Winter Clementine Dessert. Photo Susie Iventosch

Ingredients (Serves 4)

- 6-8 whole seedless Clementines, peeled (alternatively Satsumas or navel oranges)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds*
- 2 teaspoons orange blossom essence (available at Diablo Foods, Berkeley Bowl, Whole Foods etc.)
- 1 1/2-2 tablespoons honey
- 3-4 leaves of fresh mint, chopped
- 1 oz. Toblerone (or any other favorite dark or milk chocolate bar)*

Directions

Almonds

In a small stainless saucepan, bring water and sugar to a boil. Continue cooking on medium heat until all the water is evaporated and sugar starts turning color to a very light brown. Turn off heat and carefully add all nuts to caramel in one go. Stir caramel/nut mixture well using a wooden spoon or heat proof rubber spatula and immediately turn out onto a dinner plate. Careful: the caramelized nuts will be very hot, don't touch them with bare hands. Let them cool to room temperature. When the nuts are cool, pulse them in a food processor for 20 seconds, or crush them by putting them in a Ziploc freezer bag and pounding it with a heavy saucepan, mallet or hammer (watch your fingers!)

In the meanwhile, peel the Clementines, remove all the pith (the white stuff) without pulling apart the segments. Try and keep the Clementine as intact as possible. Now cut each Clementine into 4-5 slices using a sharp kitchen knife, and set aside

Honey Syrup:

Combine honey and rose water in a cup, mix well and microwave for 30 seconds on high until hot and very runny, let it cool down a bit.

To Serve

Arrange Clementine slices on a large dinner plate right before serving, top them with the rosewater honey syrup, then carefully sprinkle on the crushed caramelized nuts. Grate your favorite chocolate right over the entire plate and top with chopped mint. Serve immediately and enjoy.

Notes* To grate the chocolate, use your box grater, a Microplane zester or ribbon grater, or use a vegetable peeler to make chocolate curls. Instead of slivered almonds you can also use cashews or peanuts. For a quicker version, skip the nut caramelizing part and use honey roasted peanuts or store bought caramelized almonds instead.

"Personal" Beef Wellingtons

Charlie Vollmar, Epicurean Exchange

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This elegant staple of 1960s dinner parties derives its name from the Duke of Wellington, the 19th century English statesman and military officer. The dish is not due to his gourmet tastes, however, but rather because the final dish is said to resemble the shiny dark military boots he wore. Beef Wellington is traditionally a 2-4 pound beef tenderloin topped with mushrooms duxelle, and foie gras pate, and then encased in puff pastry. This variation uses individual filets that are wrapped in their own pastry "package."



Beef Wellington. Photo Susie Iventosch

Ingredients (Serves 4)

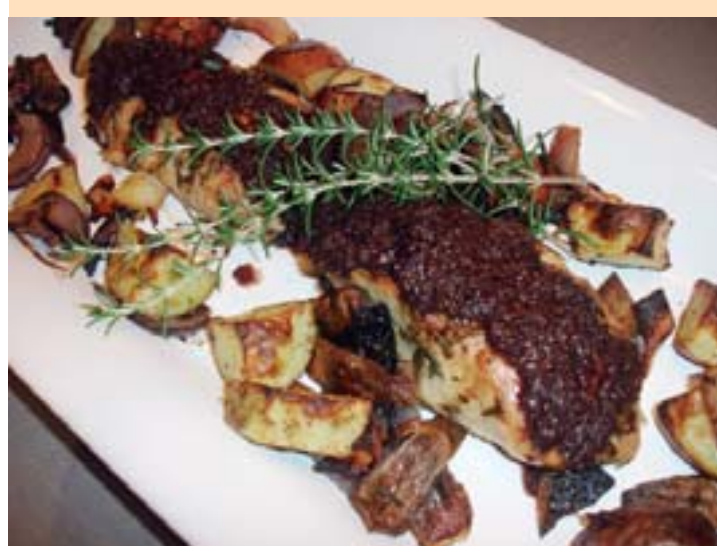
- 4 (6 ounce) 1 1/2-inch thick cut filet mignon, trimmed of fat and silver skin
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- One-half (17-1/4 ounce package) frozen puff pastry (1 sheet) thawed
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 2 shallots, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 12 cremini mushrooms, washed, trimmed and finely chopped
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1 teaspoon each kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 6 ounces duck liver pâté
- 1 large egg beaten with 2 teaspoons water

Directions

- Preheat oven to 425°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
- Prepare the Filets: Season one side of the filets with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large heavy skillet over medium-high heat until slightly smoking. Place filets seasoned-side down in the skillet, and sear until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Season second side of the filets with kosher salt and black pepper, and turn, searing the other side for an additional 2 minutes. Remove filets from pan and place on a plate to cool completely.
- Prepare the Mushrooms: Heat the butter in a medium sauté pan until frothy. Add the minced shallots and garlic and sauté until soft, about 1 minute. Add the chopped mushrooms, wine and seasonings. Sauté mushrooms until soft and all the liquid has evaporated, approximately 5 - 7 minutes. Allow mushrooms to cool completely.
- Roll out the puff pastry on a lightly floured surface to a 14-inch square, and cut into 4 (7-inch) squares.
- Spread one-quarter of the pâté on the top of each prepared filet. Spread one-quarter of the mushrooms duxelle on top of the pâté-covered filet. Place each filet, mushroom/pâté-side down, in the center of a puff pastry square. Using a pastry brush, paint the inside edges of the pastry with the egg wash. Fold the pastry over the filet as though wrapping a package and press the edges to seal. Place the packages seam-side down on the parchment-covered baking sheet. If you would like, decorate the top of each package with extra dough). Brush egg wash over the tops and sides of each package. Place packages in the pre-heated oven and bake until the pastry is golden brown and an instant-read thermometer registers 140°F for medium rare, about 20 minutes.
- Remove from the oven and let rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Roasted Pork Loin with Fig Sauce

Dianna Condon (of Dianna Condon Cuisine) enjoys making this hearty yet elegant dish for the holidays.



Pork Tenderloin with Port. Photo Susie Iventosch

Ingredients (Serves 4-6)

- Fig Sauce** 2 1/2 cups Port
- 1 1/4 cups low sodium chicken stock
- 8 dried black Mission figs, coarsely chopped
- 2 sprigs of fresh rosemary
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 tablespoon unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
- Pork** 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
- One 4 to 4-1/2 pound pork tenderloin
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth

Directions

Fig Sauce

In a medium-size, heavy saucepan, combine the port, chicken broth, figs, rosemary, cinnamon, and honey. Boil over medium-high heat until reduced by half, about 30-minutes. Discard the rosemary sprigs and cinnamon sticks. Transfer the port mixture to a blender and puree until smooth. Blend in the butter, salt, pepper. (The sauce can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and refrigerate. Re-warm over medium heat before using).

Pork

Preheat the oven to 425-F. Stir the oil, rosemary, 1 tablespoon of salt, and 1-1/2 teaspoons of pepper in a small bowl to blend. Place the pork loin in a heavy roasting pan. Spread the oil mixture over the pork to coat completely. Roast, turning the pork every 15 minutes to ensure even browning, until an instant-read meat thermometer inserted into the center of the pork registers 145-F, about 45 minutes total. Transfer the pork to a cutting board and tent with foil to keep warm. Let the pork rest for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, place the roasting pan over medium heat and stir in the chicken broth, scraping the bottom of the pan to remove any browned bits. Bring the pan juices to a simmer. Season with more salt and pepper to taste.

Cut the pork crosswise into 1/4-inch-thick slices and arrange on plates. Spoon the pan juices over. Drizzle the warm fig sauce around and serve immediately.

*When I made this delicious pork dish, I used the pan scrapings for a red-wine gravy which complemented the fig sauce in the most wonderful way-Susie

Candy Cane Biscotti

Elain Smit of Chow Bella says this is her favorite holiday recipe. "I make Candy Cane biscotti every year during the holidays and package them up in cellophane bags with a ribbon to give away as gifts or just keep around the house to have with my coffee in the morning."

Ingredients (Makes 24-30 cookies)

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
- 3 large eggs
- 3 1/4 cup all purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1teaspoon vanilla
- 20 small candy canes, finely crushed.



Candy Cane Biscotti.

Directions

Pre-heat oven 350 degrees. Beat sugar, butter and eggs in large bowl. Stir in flour, baking powder and vanilla. Fold in the broken bits of candy canes. Shape half the dough into a rectangle, 10 x 3 inches on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake for 20 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. Cool on a cookie sheet for 10 minutes. Cut crosswise into 1/2 in slices. Place sliced cut sides down on cookie sheet. Bake 15 minutes longer. Optional-drizzle melted milk chocolate over cooled biscotti.

These recipes are available on our web site.

Go to: www.lamorindaweekly.com

Susie Iventosch is the author of *Tax Bites and Tasty Morsels*, which can be found at Across the Way in Moraga, www.amazon.com, and www.taxbites.net. Susie can be reached at suziven@gmail.com.

Many of our readers like Susie's recipes. Our website now features a link to our recipe page where you can read, print or download all of the recipes we have published. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at 925-377-0977



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Community Service

We are pleased to make space available whenever possible for some of Lamorinda's dedicated community service organizations to submit news and information about their activities. Submissions can be sent to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com with the subject header In Service to the Community.

Sons in Retirement (SIR) Christmas Luncheon

Submitted by Jon Leuteneker



Campolindo High School Chamber Singers Photo Andy Schreck

More than 300 people from the Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda Branches of SIR (Sons in Retirement) gathered at the St. Mary's College Soda Center to celebrate the holidays. This annual event brings together the members, spouses and friends of Branches 171 and

174. The highlight of the luncheon was a Christmas choral presentation by the Campolindo High School Chamber Singers, directed by Stacey Kikkawa. These 32 talented students are truly a local treasure. Sons in Retirement is an organization of men who are no

longer devoting full time to their careers and who enjoy the many activities their branches offer. Our Lamorinda branches both have luncheon meetings monthly featuring a prominent speaker. There are 150 Branches of SIR in California with 20,000 members.

NCL Throws a Party at BARM

Submitted by Carrie Dern (written by Emily Davis)



Photo provided

As members of Acalanes Chapter National Charity League, the girls of class 2012 worked hard to create a wonderful holiday party for the Bay Area Rescue Mission (BARM). The BARM party was on December 4th, 2010 and was a huge success. Long before the actual party, we were busy organizing into committees for the party, such as crafts, decorations, games, gift buying and wrap-

ping, etc. When we arrived at the Bay Area Rescue Mission, we began setting up in the main building, getting ready for all of the activities. We then met everyone who was there. There were about 40 people in total who stay at the Bay Area Rescue Mission, all women and children. The kids were adorable, and we broke up into groups and helped them set up trees on each floor of the housing building.

After that, we returned to the main building to start the festivities. Games and pictures were set up in one room, while snacks, face painting, and crafts for the kids were set up in the dining area. At the very end of the party, we passed out gifts to all of the kids and all joined together to sing some holiday carols. The party was a huge success and we all had a wonderful being around all of the holiday cheer.

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Moraga Girl Scouts Lend Helping Hands

(Information submitted by Penny Drobny)



Photo Penny Drobny

Members of Moraga Girl Scout Troop 30734 recently spent several hours volunteering in the kitchen at the Bay Area Rescue Mission (BARM) in Richmond. The troop split into two groups, one going in November and the second in De-

ember (the December group is pictured.) After donning hairnets and aprons, the girls got to work peeling dozens of pounds of potatoes and carrots, serving meals to two waves of men, women and children, and washing dishes. The kitchen supervisor

complimented the girls' efforts, thanked them for their hard work, and invited them back after the holidays – tired but happy, the girls agreed that they would definitely like to return to BARM and help out again.



Visitors to Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church on the evening of December 11 were treated to a (very) live nativity scene as the courtyard was transformed into a Bethlehem manger. Photo Doug Kohen



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The Science of Happiness

... continued from page A1

It's what you'd expect from a happiness expert: laughter and close family ties. But the single mother comment interjects a sliver of uncertainty.

"Here is what I've gleaned from the many good studies I've read on the subject: It is the quality of parents' relationships with each other, rather than whether they are married or single, that matters most for kids' well-being," she wrote in a 2009 blog.

Studying happiness and related subjects like marriage and parenting is what scholars and students have been doing since Cal alumni Thomas and Ruth Ann Hornaday started the GGSC fellowship program in 2001.

"The studies that tend to be selected for the program are all positive," Carter explained. "For years, psychology has studied conditions of decline and disorder; we look for the reverse of that. For example, we looked at high school students in Oakland, where graduation rates are extremely low, who do graduate. How are their lives different, at both individual and social levels?"

The research has led to findings.

"There are skills: like gratitude. Research shows the more we consciously practice it, the happier our lives are," Carter said, before moving on to something far more difficult: "And self-discipline. It's one

thing to know what we need to do for personal happiness. It's another thing to have the discipline to practice it every day."

A colleague of Carter's, UC Irvine Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky, has her own top-two list for happiness: experiencing positive emotions like joy, contentment, interest, affection and love; and having a sense of satisfaction with the direction of your life.

Lyubomirsky has conducted studies to determine the composition of happiness. In a podcast at the center's website, she said it is 50% genes, 10% life circumstances (like money, appearance and health), and 40% intentional activity.

That last factor, intentional activity, is largely in our control, according to GGSC experts.

Rick Hanson, a neuropsychologist and author, offered evidence that the insula, a part of the brain involved with sensing feelings, can be altered with practice.

"Research has shown that as people activate their insula more, such as through meditation, the insula actually gets thicker. In other words, neurons make more and more connections with each other, which actually measurably thickens your insula,"

Carter cited research supporting other, correlational findings. Proving what we all know, she described happy

people as good at relationships, helpful, optimistic, living in the future, and committed to life goals.

Often, the people Carter encounters are parents, concerned about teaching their children to be happy.

"There are a wide range of factors for happiness. We need to get enough exercise, get enough sleep. There are a lot of things that can get between us and our happiness. You teach kids about things that lead to happiness," she began.

"Children learn from observation, so we teach them by being happy ourselves. If we spend time with our friends and that makes us happy, our kids see that and think, 'Oh, knowing your neighbors is a way to have a happy life.' But if they watch a lot of television, they'll think a new car will make them happy."

Carter is big on play and family time.

"Play time is not empty time: kids need to imagine, to make up rules, to negotiate with peers," she said. "As a working mother, I was hoping the research would come out saying it was just quality time [that mattered]. But kids need family time and times we're not nagging them. They need unstructured time."

The consequences of over-scheduling can be more severe than just the occasional

melt-down.

"If we value achievement over character, then they'll learn to steal and cheat to find happiness. Pressuring them to achieve will mean it's very difficult for us to reach our goals of teaching happiness," she said.

Carter believes the biggest happiness killers are materialism, consumption, lack of sleep and exercise, and emphasis on the self.

"Compassion starts with having emotional literacy. Having a vocabulary for identifying what I am feeling, or to recognize what another person is feeling. Helping kids label their emotions leads to emotional intelligence. It teaches them to recognize another person's suffering."

If there's a positive emotion formula: Gratitude (past) + Compassion (others) + Hope (future), why is happiness so hard to find?

Maybe because, like the lost tooth we only notice once it is gone, we don't pay as much attention to its presence as to its absence. Maybe because, like the "lost" keys we trash the house looking for, we hold it, unnoticed, in our very hands.

In this season of joy, take a minute. Breathe. Call a friend. Give. Practice every day. You'll find happiness waiting for you.

EXTRA HAPPINESS NOTES:

Happiness in other Countries
 A study conducted by Lyubomirsky asked Americans and Russians what elements lead to happiness:
Americans: concrete items, family, money, success, having fun.
Russians: spiritual salvation, a world of peace and beauty, a mutual understanding amongst peoples.

Simple Steps to Teach Compassion to Kids
 Model kindness
 Make kids responsible
 Don't use extrinsic rewards for helping behavior
 Express positive feelings
 Expose kids to needs (of others)

Advice for Teens and Adults
 Establish strong, quality, social connections
 Practice forgiveness
 Be grateful and write it down
 Practice giving
 Move. Not out of town, but around it. Exercise is an instant happiness booster.
 Stop moving. Sleep deprivation can lower your mood.
 Meditate. Being aware of internal and external environments makes people less hostile and anxious.
 Work hard. There is no quick fix. Happiness is not easy.

Link to GGSC website
<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>
 Link to Carter's blog and class lists
www.raisinghappiness.org

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email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:
Squandering money for a walkway on the EBMUD right of way, is possibly the most ridiculous idea, to ever come out of the city of bad ideas. Who is going to want to walk between the freeway and the back side of buildings? This bad idea of a walkway has to cross two four lane streets. This ridiculous waste of money called a walkway, will parallel the sidewalks on Mount Diablo Boulevard. It's obvious the recently re-elected City Council wants to give back to consultants who supported their campaigns. Why don't the politicians just have a bonfire to burn taxpayer's money?

Bruce R. Peterson
Lafayette

Editor:
I can not believe what I read on page A3. In the top article Cal Trans, a department of a state that is 28 billion dollars in debt, gives a well to do community, Lafayette, money to study the feasibility of a pathway. The following article banner reads "Fire Chief Warns of Possible Fire Station Closures". Are our priorities in order? Is a pathway or a mountainous debt the best thing to leave to our children and grandchildren? Another question, is the population at large going to benefit more from a pathway or a nearby staffed fire station? This is not the right economical time for pathways, Cal Trans, if it has money, should be spending it on repairing highway 24 through Lafayette, not pathways. I have lived in Lafayette and Moraga for 68 years and never had trouble traversing Mt. Diablo Blvd. even before there were sidewalks, traffic signals and bike lanes.

Keith Lescure
Moraga

Join our Public Forum

If you have significant knowledge about an issue facing Lamorinda or one of its cities that requires more than the 350 words to which we must limit Letters to the Editor, don't despair! You can submit your letter to our Public Forum section. Just send your letter to **letters@lamorindaweekly.com** and let us know you'd like to be considered for the Public Forum.

Editor:
When ObamaCare was passed, we were told that it would help the uninsured without hurting those who currently have health insurance. I have health insurance and now I am being told that I can no longer see my eye doctor or my retina specialist. John Muir Medical Group apparently actually read the bill and concluded that ObamaCare really will require hurting existing insured patients. They concluded that they need to have fewer doctors serving the same number of patients; they say ObamaCare will require these changes. Fewer doctors serving the same patients sure sounds like rationing to me. Maybe those who wish to revise the bill or start over are right.

Pete Williams
Moraga

Dear Mr. President,
Back in '08 my wife and I journeyed to Colorado to work on your campaign. Neither of us had been politically active before but like many Americans, we were fed up with the policies of the Bush /Cheney Administration and we believed in your message of hope and change. We are still hoping for that change while you largely continue the flawed financial policies of Bush and Cheney. Banks that were "too big to fail" are now even bigger. Geitner and Summers, who presided over the worst recession in American history, are still in charge of monetary policy. And while millions of Americans continue to lose their homes, their jobs and their savings, corporate and financial executives continue to rake in vulgar salaries and bonuses. It appears that our government is serving as a conduit for the transfer of wealth from the beleaguered and dwindling middle class to the very prosperous and wealthy. If we continue on this path we will return to the "good old" robber-baron days. The wealthy will live in gated communities with private security guards to protect them from the disgruntled and impoverished masses whose forefathers failed to amass a fortune before the last bubble broke. In spite of being in a minority position in Congress, the Republicans have been very successful in executing their agenda. Democrats, with a majority in Congress and a Democratic president, have failed miserably in providing the "loyal opposition" so necessary in a functioning democracy. Instead of watching the parade go by

you need to use the "bully pulpit" that the voters gave you in '08, Get out in front and lead.

Barack, Be Bold,
Forrest j. Cioppa, MD,CM
Moraga

Editor:
The Lafayette Community Center Foundation was very moved by the generosity of our local businesses and individuals to whom the Foundation fondly refers to as our "local celebrities". Forty-six wonderful theme baskets were donated and sold at this year's Santa's Bag Boutique and 100% of the proceeds will go directly to the much loved Lafayette Community Center buildings and programs. Lafayette Community Center Foundation Board Members and Parks, Trails & Recreation Commissioners sold the baskets at the 20th Annual Santa's Bag Boutique and raised \$1,504.84.

Those who bought baskets enjoyed the different themes such as "Lamorinda Bounty", "Spic & Span the Green Way", "Living Room Picnic", and "Truffle-icious". The Foundation wants to especially recognize the following local businesses and individuals whose basket donations made the fundraiser such a success: Trader Joe's, Round Table Pizza, Mad Science, Powell's Candy Shop, Peet's Coffee & Tea, Hamlin Cleaners, Diablo Foods, Starbucks, Adrienne Yang, The Nut Factory, Yankee Pier, Carol Federighi, Betty Vozzak DDS, Don Tatzin, Ellen Reintjes, Lynda Rexroat, John Sharpe, Maryann Hoisington, Friends of the Lafayette Library, Kindergym @ Lafayette Staff, Parkman Vineyards, Tot Drop, Karen Giorganni, The Bahl Family, the Hagel Family, Julie and Shaun Bishop, Nancy Goldner and Zoreh Khaligh.



Yours in gratitude,
Anne Wondolowski, Chairperson
And the Lafayette Community Center Foundation Members

Editor:
In the Dec.8th almost-Christmas edition of the Lamorinda Weekly, David K. Lindemuth declares himself to be a member of the "walking dead." Perhaps he has his holidays confused. In the spirit of Easter, let us all hope that he's given reading privileges when he rises from his grave. If so, I'd recommend a report titled "Integrated Science Assessment for Particulate Matter," published by the E.P.A. and available online at this

link: http://www.epa.gov/ttnaaqs/standards/pm/s_pm_2007_isa.html. This comprehensive study, to which leading scientists from all over the country contributed, examined with great care the effect of airborne Particulate Matter (P.M.) on all of us. P.M. consists of microscopic particles we can't see. It circulates much more freely and is much more invasive than dust and dirt. The report concludes that short and long term exposure to P.M. poses a genuine health threat to those with compromised cardio-vascular systems and to those with respiratory problems. In the latter group, pregnant women and their fetuses were most at risk for developing asthma and related respiratory illnesses from exposure to P.M. The data collected also revealed that exposure to P.M. resulted in a greater likelihood of myocardial infarction (heart attack), heart injury, and congestive heart failure, particularly for those with pre-existing cardiac conditions. I would refer Mr. Lindemuth to Chs. 6, 7, and 8 in the study for a specific catalogue of findings. Are leaf blowers the only contributor to P.M. pollution? Of course not. Are they a significant contributor? Of course they are. Anyone who has watched a blower apply a 200 mph blast of air to dry dirt and debris and followed the blower operator as he moves in a swirl of such debris knows this. The cumulative effect of multiple blowers, operating throughout the day six days of the week, 12 months of the year, raises significant concern about increased P.M. exposure in our community. Some, of course, may question the health threat caused by leaf blowers. Reasonable people may disagree in a reasonable manner. But even if we were to dismiss the air pollution concerns regarding these machines, the noise pollution they generate is reason enough to give us pause about their use. Finally, this matter is about civility and respect for our neighbors. When, as we heard at the Nov. Council meeting, an elderly gardener cannot work peacefully in his backyard garden; when schoolchildren cannot use their backyards on Saturdays because of the cacophony of leaf blowers on their cul-de-sac; when senior citizens complain that they cannot walk peacefully through the neighborhoods they have enjoyed for years without encountering the grinding roar of leafblowers; can't we as a community acknowledge this problem and agree that we can do better?

Jeffrey Segall
Orinda

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Life in LAMORINDA

Decorating for the Holidays—Just Do It

By Andrea A. Firth



Nikolene Isely created 3 unique wreaths for these 3 different doors.



Photos Doug Kohen



Sue Cuneo used pine cones and a great bow to create a special entranceway welcome.



Erin Mason in her living room surrounded by a holiday tree, table vignette, and wreath she designed. Photo Doug Kohen



The mantel display in Nikolene Iseley's home mirrors the wall art—a painting by the designer. Photo Doug Kohen

For Nikolene Isely, decorating for the holidays is a joy not a chore. "Making your home festive for the holidays is a creative process," says Isely, the owner of Staging by Design in Moraga. "It's important to be spontaneous and to try something new. That's what makes it fun." To get some fresh ideas for festive holiday décor, Isely took the Lamorinda Weekly on a tour of three area homes – her own, and the homes of her colleague Erin Mason and her friend Sue Cuneo.

All three women have backgrounds in design and staging, and they each have a unique holiday look that fits their home and style.

The holiday décor in Isely's home is traditional with some twists. "I like to combine things in an unexpected way, making new connections is the fun part," says Isely. For example, she pairs crystal goblets with spray-painted gourds,

shiny silver balls, and a lime green fabric remnant to create an elegant and playful table centerpiece. Erin Mason's holiday home has a rustic, natural look, and there is a version of "Rudolph" (without the shiny red-nose) in almost every room. "I've collected the reindeer over the years," says Mason. "I also like organic materials. This year, I am using burlap and jute as accents." And the blues and yellows in Sue Cuneo's cozy, country-style home provide a good backdrop for her Santas and snowmen and make her cherry-red ornaments pop.

Photographs of these homes are displayed on this page and page L3, and a more complete photo gallery can be accessed at www.lamorindaweekly.com/deco.html.

First Impressions

A wreath on the front door is the perfect place to start decorating for the holidays, and the look of the wreath can be easily changed or updated from year to year. Isely likes to use fresh wreaths but finds the faux wreaths available today very attractive as well. It's important to coordinate with the front door color, notes the designer, "The customary red and green colors of Christmas don't work on every door." When Isely shops for wreath decorations she keeps the front door color in mind and builds from there. "Less is more. You only need three or four decorative elements to make a special wreath," she says. "You want your brightest element to really bring some punch and not be overwhelmed. Sometimes a fabulous bow and a bit of ribbon is all you need."

... continued on page L3

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Moraga Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors Meetings
Meetings of the MOFD Board of Directors are open to the public and take place on the third Wednesday of each month in the Board Room, Administration Building, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga.

Next meeting(s):

January 10th, 6:30pm
Finance Committee Meeting, Station 41 (1280 Moraga Way, Moraga), (go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for more information)

MOFD Appoints 2011 Officers

Olsen nominated for vacant LAFCO seat

By Lucy Amaral

At its December 15 meeting, Frank Sperling, Dick Olsen and John Wyro were sworn in as members of the Board of Directors for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD). The oath of office was administered by the Honorable John Kennedy, Judge of the Superior Court, Contra Costa County. All three are returning members of the Board. Sperling and Olsen ran unopposed and were appointed in lieu of election. For Division 4, Wyro ran against Orinda resident, Bob Jungbluth in the November elections. Each member will serve a four-year term on the board.

The Board of Directors also appointed its Officers for the 2011

year. Beginning January 1, Wyro will assume the position of President, Fred Weil was appointed Vice President, Brook Mancinelli will be Secretary and Olsen will act as Treasurer. Sperling, the 2010 Board President, will move to general member. Sperling said that as president, Wyro will preside over the Board of Directors meetings, handle press inquiries and make statements on behalf of the entire Board. Weil, as vice president, would step in for the President when Wyro is not available. And, as a matter of course, Weil is the presumptive next President for the following year.

During this meeting the

Board nominated Olsen to run for the Special District seat on the Local Agency Formation Commission's (LAFCO) Board of Directors. This vacancy was created by the departure of former LAFCO board member David Piepho. Each Special District, such as MOFD, is allowed to nominate one board member to be considered for the position.

LAFCO, a regulatory agency, is charged by the state to oversee (among other items) the boundaries of cities, towns and Special Districts (such as MOFD), as well as water and sewer districts to ensure orderly growth. Currently, the LAFCO Board consists of two city

members selected by the cities in the County, two County members selected by the Board of Supervisors, two Special District members selected by the Independent Special Districts in the County, and one public member selected by the other six LAFCO Commissioners.

The election will be held Monday, January 24 during the quarterly meeting of the Contra Costa Special Districts Association. Olsen, if elected, will serve out Piepho's current term which, according to the LAFCO's website, ends in May of 2012.

When asked about his objectives for serving on LAFCO's Board, Olsen said that given his ex-

tensive background in the areas of fire and emergency medical services, he believes he can make major, constructive contributions to any efforts LAFCO may undertake in response to the current fiscal crisis many County and City fire service agencies are facing.

"It is my (and the MOFD Board's) desire that any and all actions that LAFCO might take in the future in response to that crisis will, in fact, result in improving fire and emergency medical services county-wide and will not in any way degrade the superior service levels that the residents and taxpayers of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District currently enjoy," said Olsen.

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Better Homes and Gardens
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Risk Concepts Insurance Brokers
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Balloons will mark the place for the Ribbon Cutting ceremony on January 18, 4pm. Come and meet owners Kelly and Mike Robertson.

Farmyard Darlings Takes Root at Mt. Diablo Nursery
Mt. Diablo Nursery & Garden
3295 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette, 283-3830
Lafayette residents Kim Berry and Carole Sinclair are cowgirls at heart with a passion for discovering vintage collectibles from all over Northern California. They recently held a reception and sale at Mt Diablo Nursery, in Harry's House Gift Shop (named after the nursery's founder, Harry Ide). The event was so successful that nursery owners Marcia and Garth Jacober and Farmyard Darlings agreed to a continuing exhibit,



Kim Berry and Carole Sinclair by an antique car. Photo courtesy Farmyard Darlings

the theme of which will change every month. Berry and Sinclair were both raised with horses, one in La Jolla and one in Alamo. They both moved to Lafayette for the schools and met at a common friend's Christmas party. "It was love at first sight," said Sinclair, "we are kindred spirits." Both women had been collecting one-of-a-kind treasures that they reclaimed and had in their homes. Friends started asking them to find similar items for their own homes and they expanded both their hunting grounds and client base. They found another kindred spirit in Marcia Jacober, who runs Harry's House Gift Shop

where she sells unique accessories. The association of the Darlings and the Nursery made a lot of sense. Garth Jacober said, "There is a lot of interest in the community for what they sell and we love to have interesting, changing things in the store." Every second Friday of each month there will be a reception to present the theme for the month, said Berry. The next event will be on Friday, January 14th.

News from the three Chambers of Commerce

- No Mixer in January for the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. Save the date of February 9 for the first mixer of 2011 at Wells Fargo Bank from 5:30 to 7 pm.
- Shop Lafayette Committee meeting on Tuesday, January 11 at 12:30pm in the Chamber Conference Room
- Green Committee Meeting on Wednesday, January 19 at 12:00pm in Chamber Conference Room. BYOL! (Bring your own lunch)
- Entrepreneur's Club on Thursday, Jan-

uary 20 at 8:30am in the Chamber Conference Room

Moraga

- California Independent Film Festival Comes to Moraga from January 28th through February 3rd. Between one and three thousand people will attend this film festival, which should benefit the business community in many ways. There are many ways to be involved. Email Beau Behan, Manager of The New Rheem Theatre at beau@caiff.org for more information or if you want to be part of the fun of helping with this event. Check the website, www.CAIFF.com for updates.

Orinda

- Orinda Chamber Luncheon on Friday, January 28, 2011 from noon-1:30 pm at the Orinda Country Club, 315 Camino Sobrante, Orinda. RSVP: Highly recommended. To purchase tickets online go to the Chamber's web site at orindachamber.org. The cost is \$30.00 per person. The guest Speaker is Tom Franier, co-owner of Semifreddi's Bakery. He will be talking about "Slow Capitalism."

...not a creature was stirring, not even a...

Mona Miller, DVM

This year has seen the highest wild rodent populations in recent history, due to the cycle of a wet winter/spring and a cool summer, which allows more vegetation to flourish and remain through summer for longer. Voles, rats and ground squirrels have surged in numbers. These creatures have relatively short lifespans and achieve reproductive maturity early on, with short gestation periods. Thus, hundreds of offspring can be born during a single year.

The use of poisons to kill rodents (rodenticides) can be dangerous to any mammal (think pet dog, cat, even rabbit or rat who is allowed outside). There are four

types of rodenticides, and all can be deadly to the animal that ingests the poison. The most common type is an anti-coagulant, a chemical that prevents blood from clotting. This results in internal bleeding within 2 to 5 days of ingestion. Symptoms are variable and dependent upon where in the body the bleeding is occurring. For instance, bleeding into joints will appear as limping. Likewise, difficulty breathing, distention of the stomach area, bloody vomit or diarrhea, and bruises on skin, eyes or mouth can also be symptoms; as well as general weakness or not eating. The antidote treatment to this type is Vitamin K medication. If bleeding has

already started, then emergency medicine is vital for success, involving special blood tests to diagnose the clotting disorder, as well as blood or plasma transfusions to provide immediate clotting factors or proteins to "band-aid" the problem for 24 hours until the Vitamin K becomes effective. If you suspect or know that your dog has ingested rat bait, do not wait until bleeding has started before seeing your veterinarian. The sooner that Vitamin K is administered, the sooner the clotting factors can start to build up again, and prevent internal hemorrhage.

The second most common rat/mouse poison is Cholecalciferol,

which acts as a Vitamin D analog and increases blood levels of calcium and phosphorus. Once these levels become too high, kidney failure will develop within 2 to 4 days after ingestion of the poison. This requires emergency and intensive care, and prognosis is variable. There is no antidote, so treatment is based on supportive care for the kidneys and to dilute out the high calcium in the bloodstream.

The third rodenticide is Bromethalin, which results in swelling of the brain within 2 to 24 hours of ingestion. Symptoms will be neurologic, including weakness and wobbliness, muscle tremors,

seizures and paralysis. Treatment is supportive and intensive and requires in-hospitalization care for 3 to 6 days, if recovery occurs.

The fourth rodenticide is commonly used as gopher bait – the zinc phosphide group. This poison releases toxic phosphine gas in the stomach when ingested, and secondary liver disease. Symptoms include stomach bloat, vomit, abdominal pain and shock.

If you suspect that your pet has ingested any rodenticide, you should seek immediate veterinary care. Additionally, it is helpful to your vet if you bring the poison package with you, to determine the active ingredient.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her young son and two cats. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to MonaSDVM@aol.com.



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Decorating for the Holidays—Just Do It

... continued from page L1



Table centerpiece display by Nikolene Isely.

Photos Doug Kohen

Getting Started

When you start to plan your holiday décor there are a number of things to consider, says Isely, who also does home holiday decorating professionally. "You need to think about the style of the house, the family's lifestyle, and the colors that run through the home." There are a host of holiday decor color options available so that the decorations can be coordinated with the home's interior décor. "Right now there are a lot of copper-colored holiday decorations available," says Isely. She suggests mixing the copper with bronze and gold decorations for a home that has peach tones.

"I always start decorating right at the beginning of December, so we can enjoy the decorations through the season," says Mason. "But then I take it down really quickly once the holiday is over," she adds.

Vignettes and Accents
"Any surface can serve as a place for a holiday display, or vignette," says Isely. A tabletop, shelf, or stack of books with red bindings can be used as the platform for a mini-holiday scene. "Candles really warm up a room and you can turn almost anything into a candleholder," she adds. Isely uses cut-glass

punch glasses to house votives and notes that old teacups can be used the same way. "I like to add some sparkle to every room. And if something breaks I don't throw it away." Isely repurposed two leaky Waterford crystal goblets to serve as candleholders and placed the broken top of a glass decanter on her table display for some added glitter.

Isely acknowledges that holiday decorating can be overwhelming for some. She has been collecting decorations for years and knows where to get to just what she needs. She encourages starting small. "Try something new. Don't over think it. Just do it."



Isely places an antique porcelain doll tree-topper on her tree.



One of Erin Mason's many reindeer.




Table vignette by Erin Mason (on the left) and a table center piece by Sue Cuneo.

Holiday Decorating Tips from Nikolene

- Creativity comes from within, be spontaneous, make new connections.
- Decorate a month in advance, so you have time to enjoy it, then take it down fast.
- Think about placement. Temporarily take down a painting or move furniture to create space and avoid conflicts.
- Use everyday items in new ways—a colorful wool scarf can serve as a table runner.
- Use unscented candles, so there is no conflict with the aromas of cooking foods. Look for long-burning votives, some last up to eight hours.
- Place mirrors beneath and behind holiday displays to enhance the sparkle of lights and candles.
- Always use odd numbers, e.g., 1 Santa, 3 snowmen, 5 votives, 7 decorative balls, in vignettes.
- Don't over think it, just do it.

Nikolene Isely owns Staging By Design: www.stagerbydesign.com, nikoleneisely@gmail.com, (925) 360-0947.
Erin Mason provides help with design, staging, and organization: emason@me.com, (704) 904-3387.

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Meet *The Elusive Immigrant*

Orinda's John Benzie Publishes First Novel

By Lou Fancher



Accountant-turned-novelist John D. Benzie Photos Lou Fancher

Meeting with an accountant normally doesn't leave a person gasping for air—except perhaps, when contemplating the wide berth between one's ways and one's means—but interviewing John Benzie, retired accountant and Orinda author, is breathtaking.

Accompanied by his wife and editor, Cherry, it's like a Wimbledon match, played out in a kitchen. Words fly back and forth between the two and there's no referee to call "time out!"

"We moved to Orinda in 1972," Benzie said.

"January 1972," Cherry added.

"I did some research on the world: where would I like to live? I learned that some people liked New York, some liked Houston, but everybody liked San Francisco."

"In six months we immigrated, bought a house, found a job and had a baby," Cherry summarized.

The Benzies, arriving from England, lived in San Francisco and Montclair before

finally settling in Orinda. Their ranch house on a hill was small, but thirty-five years later, remodeling has transformed it into a scenic oasis. Quirky, artistic touches, like the authentic cast iron British phone booth (with life-size mannequin "Fiona" forever waiting for a lover's call) hint at Benzie's humor and heritage.

The Elusive Immigrant, Benzie's first novel, is a Scotsman's yarn. It's a mystery about an accountant, Sawyer Fawkes, who becomes inexplicably entangled in an arson investigation. When Scotland Yard zeroes in on him, he flees the country. This sets off a tumbleweed of events, with Fawkes assuming a new identity in America.

Along the way, the author spins a rich, detailed history of international commerce, immigration, travel, business accounting, corporate corruption, and Bay area history.

Benzie worked on the book off-and-on for four years.

"Some weeks I'd do nothing because we'd travel. And I

didn't do the chapters in sequence either. I'd do a chapter, knowing where it would fit in later. It was sort of sketched out in my mind."

"The problem is, later on, you'd look back and think, 'Did I write that?' because it was no longer good," Cherry jumped in.

"I had a very tough editor," Benzie said, half-joking.

"I use my red pencil a lot," Cherry admitted. "It's a wonder we're still married."

The Benzies have been married 49 years and have two sons, Gordon and Andrew. Cherry was always the artist, drawing and writing, until one day, when she invited her husband to join her writing class.

Together, they tell the story of how Benzie found his writer's voice.

"It was at a one week conference in Santa Barbara. There were numerous instructors. Once you paid your fee, you just moved from one to the next. The last morning, we were thinking to leave early, but the Scotsman in me said, 'I paid for breakfast,' so I'll stay for the meal.

They were giving prizes, and we were not really listening, but then we heard my name. I didn't even know I'd entered! Then Ray Bradbury said, 'Come on up here.' Suddenly, before 400 potential writers, I was reading my story."

The experience boosted his confidence.

Benzie wrote mostly in the mornings, fitted around whatever else he was doing.

"Sometimes I could spend one hour on a paragraph. The first page would get the most corrections. I'm not a romantic writer, so my editor would comment on that."

Benzie eyed his wife, exchanging smiles, before continuing.

"I like writing. When I was Vice President of Finance for Transamerica Realty, I'd sometimes try to slip a little humor in an annual report. I think those got x-ed out," he added, his dry tone speaking volumes.

"I think the general image of an accountant is that we are extraordinarily precise. Very narrow minded and right-brained. The fact that an accountant could write an interesting book is as likely as a dog ordering a beer in a bar," he joked.

When it was complete, the Benzies chose to self-publish the novel.

"We heard from many agents that the number of books they'd accept would be less than two percent. Of that, publishers would accept less than ten percent. The numbers weren't very good," Benzie concluded.

Trusting his accountant's expertise, Benzie used Create-Space to print 100 books. The first print run sold out and 100 more have been produced.

"We're doing print on demand right now," he said, the gleam in his eye suggesting a hidden plot. "But there are 360,000 CPA's in the United States, and if I can reach even a portion of those...."

The Elusive Immigrant, by John D. Benzie, is available at www.elusiveimmigrant.com.



This cast iron British phone booth stands in the Benzies' yard

Cartoonist Barry Hunau revisits some of Lamorinda's more controversial issues of 2010.



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Coldwell Banker and Caldecott Properties Reflect on the Year in Real Estate

By Lou Fancher

There's no doubt inflated home mortgages and irresponsible lenders left a swath of devastation across the country during the last two years. Whether it was a precipitous drop, or a sickening, steady slide into debt and default, home owners and investors continue to reel from the consequences of the sudden reversal in what was, during the early 2000's, a booming real estate market.

Although Lamorinda was largely immune from the plunging valuations, the impact on local real estate companies was not insignificant.

Andy Read, Broker/Owner at Caldecott Properties, and Val Cook-Watkins, Manager at Coldwell Banker in Orinda, took time from their 24/7 schedules to answer questions about the market and its effect on their businesses.

"The biggest change for Caldecott Properties was opening an office in Moraga a few doors down from the Rheem Theater," Read wrote, in his reply.

For the market in general, Read identified the greatest changes of the past year: lower interest rates, the expiration of the California fist time homebuyer and new construction tax credits and the end of the Federal first time/repeat homebuyer credit.

In reference to the importance of lender guidelines, he overlapped comments made by Cook-Watkins: both agencies found lenders to be far more stringent.

"Approximately 20% of deals are falling out of escrow because the borrower does not qualify for the loan, or the prop-

erty does not appraise," Read said.

"We are facing restrictive lending practices which are limiting the buying power of the consumer, Cook-Watkins reported. "Appraisers are unusually conservative with their appraisal reports, even with solid data to support prices."

Cook-Watkins went on to say that, as a result, "buyers are very aggressive with their offers with regards to underbidding listed prices and many small independently owned companies are closing or selling to larger firms."

The two companies had slightly different perspectives on the 2010 Lamorinda market. Read stated that the number of sales in Lamorinda increased from 411 in 2009, to 473 in 2010, based on MLS data, and described the number of distressed sales as "consistent."

Cook-Watkins was less positive: "We are seeing more short sales and bank owned properties come on the market."

Their answers about the effects of changing legislation, parcel taxes, slumping entrepreneurial business start-ups, and related matters, were predictable: all have reduced sales, but not drastically, due to the area's solid tax base and relative affluence.

Predictably, they cite the internet as the most powerful factor in today's market and in determining their business practices.

"Agents have to be knowledgeable about lending practices and bank requirements. They need to be technologically savvy and skilled to navigate resources on the internet. They need to understand how to negotiate short sales and deal with

Bank owned properties," Cook-Watkins said. "Buyers and sellers want agents who are skilled in negotiating and risk management—and who have keen and up to date market knowledge."

"Buyers and sellers are incredibly sharp," Read began. "The internet allows them access to the same data as real estate professionals. Over 80% of buyers first see the property they purchase online. The internet has become the most important marketing tool for real estate. If you don't use the website of your broker to search for properties, prospective buyers likely don't either."

With an eye to marketing, and also, because many agents employed at Caldecott and Coldwell Banker live and raise their families in the area, both agencies are actively involved in local charities and community events.

Caldecott supports the East Bay Symphony, East Bay Humane Society, Cal Shakes, and Shotgun Players.

Coldwell Banker's major contributions go to Habitat for Humanity, both in raising money and with agents working on local builds. The Orinda office sponsors "Adopt an Angel" with gifts for foster children and, this year, created the Spencer Neale Memorial Scholarship, offering two scholarships to Campolindo High School graduating seniors.

As for the future, Read predicted the following: "We believe the market will remain flat for the next two to three years, and then will begin to appreciate at modest rates. Our mission remains to serve our clients' interests to the best of our ability."

Cook-Watkins offered

both general and specific comments: "Our goal is always to make the home buying and selling process pleasurable for the consumer and to protect their interests and exceed their expectations with the service we provide and the experiences they have. We are looking forward to expanding our local and internet presence with social networking and cyber marketing. Our philosophy is that a knowledgeable and informed client is a satisfied and happy client."

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LAMORINDA SPORTS

Acalanes Falls to Campolindo

Lamorinda Girls Soccer Wraps Up for Winter Break
By Abby Klinkenberg



Emily Orwig (20) drives past Katelyn Rader (6). Orwig had two assists on the night. Photo Doug Kohen

Campolindo hosted Acalanes on the frigid night of Friday, December 10, turning out a 2-0 victory over its league rivals with two goals in the second half. Although the season is just beginning, Campolindo is looking threatening. Acalanes has promise of its own, despite losing the match; much of the Dons' starting lineup is injured.

Coming off a 2-1 win against Miramonte two days prior, the Acalanes Dons marched into the match looking strong. The first shot on goal came ten minutes into the first

half from Acalanes senior Celina Velasco, the first of her game-leading three shots on goal. This promising start was met by a strong defensive effort by Campolindo. Twenty-three minutes into the first half, the Cougars' Emily Orwig started a rally with a shot on goal, followed by two from teammates, all of them saved by Dons' sophomore keeper Brooke Balfrey. Balfrey had seven saves on the night. At the half, the score remained 0-0 despite four shots on goal by both teams.

Campolindo senior Tori Ringquist commented on Head

Coach Ernesto Silva's half time talk: "[Our coach] told us to settle down and relax because this was a very emotional game; he said 'just relax and do what you know how to do.'"

Silva's speech clearly worked, as two minutes into the second half came the breakthrough for Campolindo—a goal by senior Samantha Miller, assisted by Orwig, the first of her two assists on the night. Campolindo dominated the second half as they continued to create scoring opportunities at the expense of the of Acalanes' defense. Twenty minutes later,



Tori Ringquist (50) heads the ball. Photo Doug Kohen

sophomore Hadley Swanson's shot found its way into the back of the net, again assisted by Orwig. Campolindo held on to take the win 2-0.

DFAL Offensive Player of the Year and one of the Acalanes' injured players, senior captain Anja Simonsen, commented her team's loss to Campolindo as well as on their season so far: "Against Campolindo we lacked cohesion in the midfield and weren't really a threat in front of the goal," said Simonsen. "I was excited coming into the season because I thought we had a lot of poten-

tial, but we've had a rough start with all our injuries."

Ringquist, on the other hand, was very pleased by her team's performance and is inspired by its overall chemistry. "We played collectively as a team; we didn't do well in the first half and we picked it up and we figured it out as a team and it wasn't an individual effort," she said. "This year there's a lot of chemistry on the field. So, we hope to go to and do well at NCS. We're good; we're no small thing."

Campolindo's confidence is fueling its momentum; the

Cougars haven't lost since the win over Acalanes. They tied 2-2 against a strong Dublin team and subsequently beat Miramonte 2-0.

Acalanes, Campolindo, and Miramonte enter the break with 1-1-2, 2-1-1, and 1-1-2 records, respectively. After falling to Acalanes on December 8th, Miramonte bounced back with fervor. The Mats' biggest win, 3-1, was against Las Lomas on December 15th. They dropped their next match against Campolindo, 0-2, on December 17th.



Becca Bostwick (12) and Nicole Patera (17) face off. Photo Doug Kohen



Celina Velasco (17) notched three shots on goal in the loss. Photo Doug Kohen

Junior Olympic Qualifiers

Submitted by Marion Lee



Oleg Daneev (on left) Photo Jenny Helms



From left: Coach George Platt, Casey Lee, and assistant coach Ryan Arieta Photo Taylor Lee

On December 11th and 12th, Acalanes High School freshmen Casey Lee and Oleg Daneev qualified to participate in the U.S.A. Junior Olympics for foil and saber fencing. Lee qualified in the Women's Cadet (U17) Foil event, and Daneev qualified in

the Men's Cadet (U17) Saber event. Both fencers placed third respectively and come from George Platt's Swordplay Fencing Academy in Concord. The U.S.A. Junior Olympics will be held in February 2011 in Dallas, Texas.

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- Fri, Dec 31** MBB Hartford McKeon Pavilion 5:00 PM
- Thu, Jan 6** WBB Loyola Marymount McKeon Pavilion 7:00 p.m.
- Sat, Jan 8** WBB Pepperdine McKeon Pavilion 2:00 p.m.
- Thu, Jan 13** MBB San Francisco McKeon Pavilion 7:30 p.m.
- Sat, Jan 15** MBB Santa Clara McKeon Pavilion 8:00 p.m.

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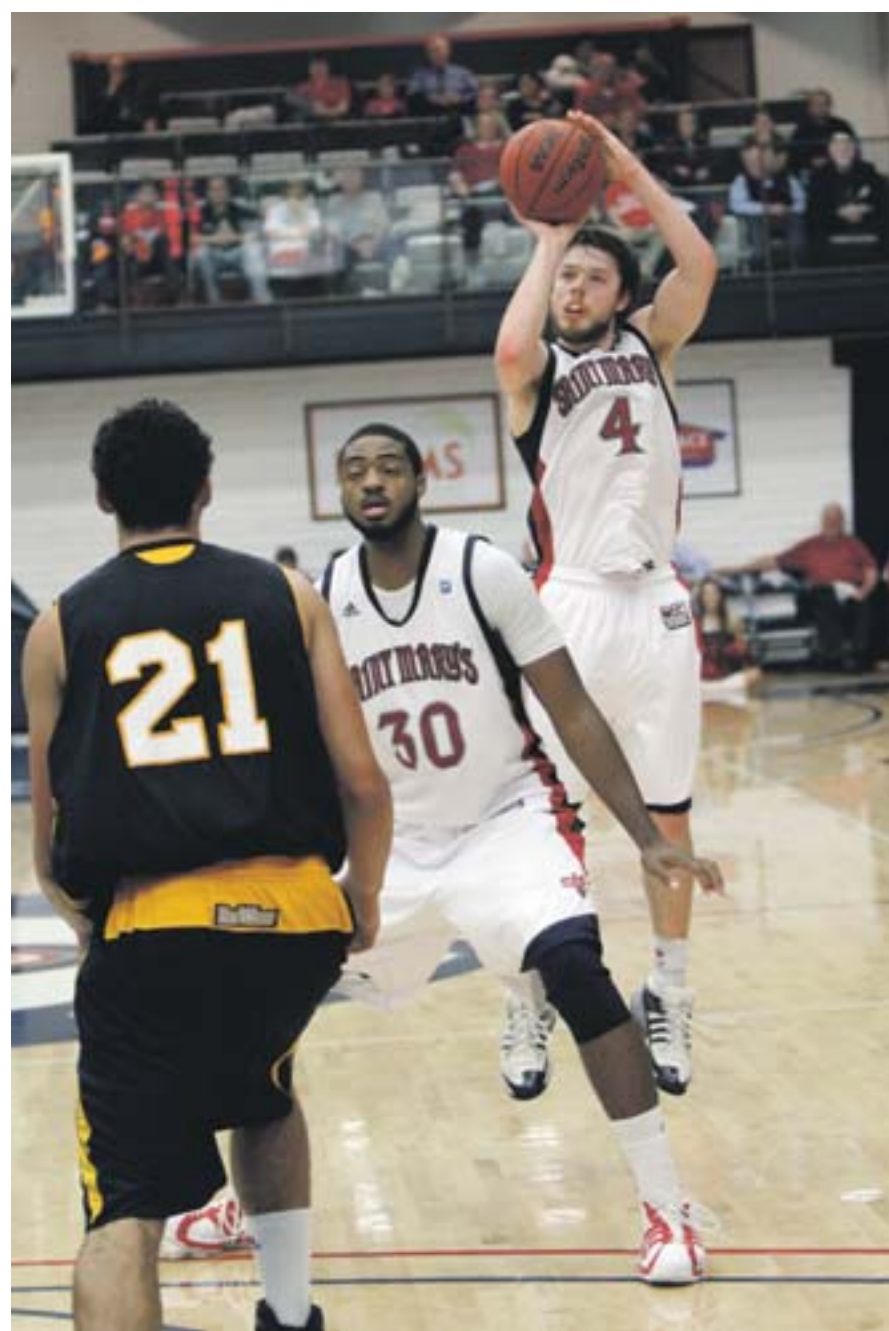


SPORTS

LAMORINDA'S LOCAL SPORTS

Gaels Win Three in a Row

By Bryant West



Sophomore guard Matthew Dellavedova (4) had 23 points in the win against UC Riverside. Photo Tod Fierner



Junior forward Rob Jones (22) calls for the ball. He notched a double-double against Denver. Photo Tod Fierner



Sophomore forward Mitchell Young (3) rejects the shot attempt. Photo Tod Fierner

After facing two top 20 squads in road contests – and losing both – the Saint Mary's Gaels basketball needed a home-court recovery.

The Gaels returned to Moraga for two games – and two victories – a 77-47 win over Denver on December 8th and a 75-56 win over UC Riverside on December 14th. The Gaels then traveled to Anaheim, California to compete in the John R. Wooden Classic on Saturday, and earned a 82-74 victory over Long Beach State.

“At the end of the year, it will be a key win for us,” head coach Randy Bennett said after Saturday’s win. “It’s a key win for us now because we had to fight through some adversity on the road and come from behind to win the game. That is where your toughness and belief as a team is built.”

The Gaels went through arguably the toughest part of their schedule two weeks ago, with losses to then #23 BYU and #17 San Diego State. Since then, San Diego State has jumped to #10 in the ESPN/USA Today College poll, and BYU to #18.

But a return to McKeon Pavilion proved all the medicine the Gaels needed as they dominated the Denver Pioneers on December 8th with a 77-47 victory. Junior forward Rob Jones earned his second double-double of the season and led the way with 17 points and 10 boards, while sophomore forward Mitchell Young had 14 points. Senior guard Mickey McConnell finished with 12 points and four assists.

The contest was never in question, as the Gaels shot a high 59.6 percent from the floor and held the Pioneers to just 37.5 percent while allowing only 17 first half points. Saint Mary’s also outrebounded Denver by a 39 to 15 margin.

The home-winning streak reached seven on the year as the Gaels bested UC Riverside for a 75-56 victory on December 14th. Jones led the Gaels again, this time with 24 points and 11 rebounds, shooting 9-15 from the field and 6-9 from three-point territory. Sophomore guard Matthew Dellavedova added 23 points and six assists of his own, and McConnell added eight points and seven assists. Guard Javon Borum had 15 for the Highlanders.

The Gaels only shot 40 percent in the first half, but held a 29-22 halftime lead thanks to their resilient defense, which held UC Riverside to 34 percent shooting. In the second half, the Gaels didn’t improve much from the floor – shooting 44 percent in the half and finishing at 42 percent overall – but caught on from downtown, sinking nine-of-19 three point shots and edging away from the Highlanders. Jones and Dellavedova each had 14 second half points.

Last Saturday, Young had a career night and McConnell took over in the final minutes as Saint Mary’s prevailed late against Long Beach State in their 82-74 win in the John R. Wooden Classic.

Young scored 28 on the night, shooting 13-of-18 from the field, and added six boards. McConnell had 18 points while junior forward Clint Steindl had 13 points and four assists. All five of Long Beach State’s starters had double figures, led by forward T.J. Robinson’s 19 points and nine board performance, but got just two bench points.

The Gaels got down early after Long Beach State started the game on a 10-0 run before Young scored the first Saint Mary’s point 16:41 on the clock.

“I was proud of our guys,” Bennett said. “We could have got frustrated, lost our composure and put ourselves in a deeper hole. We weathered the storm.”

The two teams battled back-and-forth most of the game until a three pointer by Steindl gave the Gaels a 68-66 lead with 4:19 to go. McConnell took over from there, scoring eight of his 12 in the final 3:19 to keep Saint Mary’s on top.

“It’s how we are sometimes - it takes us awhile to get going,” McConnell said afterwards. “We found a rhythm towards the end of the game. Our guys knew that once we got the lead, we could go from there. We got some stops down the stretch and that really helped.”

The Gaels will head back on the road for their next match, flying to Las Cruces, New Mexico on December 23rd to take on the New Mexico State Aggies, who currently sit at 2-10. Saint Mary’s will then fly to Las Vegas, Nevada and take on the 8-4 Mississippi State Bulldogs for a December 29th contest at the Orleans Arena.

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Youth Sports Registration

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Registration for Lamorinda Rugby Club is now open for the 2011 season! No prior rugby experience necessary, just a love of fast-paced contact sports. Practices start after Thanksgiving, Nov. 29. Youth season runs through March; High School finishes regular season end of April. Come on out!

Register online at www.LamoRugby.com. For more info contact Nancy Taylor 925-253-1435, or check the website for FAQ and schedule info.

Lamorinda Soccer Club 2011 Winter Weekend Clinics begin in January for kids ages 6-13 years old. If you have a player who loved fall soccer, wants to try a new sport, or wants to see if traveling soccer is a good fit, come out to Bentley school to learn new skills, meet the coaches and have fun! For more information and to sign up, go to the LMSC website at lamorindasc.com registrar@lamorindasc.com

If you would like to list the registration information for a youth sports club please email wendy@lamorindaweekly.com or call (925) 377-0977. B&W listing \$24 per inch, Color listing \$34 per inch.

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Campolindo's Verdon Competes in Nationals

By Lou Fancher



(L to R): senior Sara Mostatabi, freshman Haley Shipway, junior Juliet Farnan, senior Grace Orders, junior Carrie Verdon, sophomore Megan McMillian, junior Rachel Meadows Photo provided

Campolindo High School's Carrie Verdon is the 19th fastest female high school runner in the country. She competed in the Foot Locker West Region Nationals in Southern California on December 11 to claim that title.

At 16, with only three years of cross country experience, she ran a 17:15 at the State Championship meet in November, making her also the 10th fastest Californian of all time.

In fact, it's hard to imagine a sentence about Verdon without the word "fastest".

"She's gifted," Coach Chuck Woolridge said. "Carrie has an aerobic capacity that pre-determines her to be good at running. Mechanically she's also in the one percent of kids that have come into my program who has had few adjustments to make. She's able to maximize and improve because she's not fighting deficiencies."

Verdon's explanation for her commanding performance this season is equally straightforward: "I work on keeping my arm swing good. My hands stick out and waste energy. Just being conscious of my form is what fixes it," she said.

Verdon was afraid of Woolridge when she first joined the team.

"At practice, he expects a lot. I didn't know the level of intensity I had gotten myself into until I was in it. He taught me everything there is to know. We would get videos of running form and technique to study. Former athletes came to talk to us. We got information about what to eat, where to practice and I think that's what shaped me into who I am today," Verdon said of the experience.

Coach Woolridge commented on his practice experience: "Carrie is the athlete that makes coaches do their research and look to improve their skills. It's precious to have someone with her talent and willingness.

Definition of "Team"

Verdon:

"The first thing that comes to mind is a group that really works together. They put others before them to work towards a common goal. They motivate each other. They call each other out and they tell each other to step it up. People only see the number one finisher, but there's all the other girls out there putting themselves out for you."

Woolridge:

"A team is a group of athletes willing to share the burden of what it takes to achieve a goal. We take pride in making every kid in our program feel responsible for the team. When you have a group of kids all motivated to work at that level, you get an incredible synergy. Practices are electric. It's 85 kids enjoying that suffering."

She's kept me motivated to improve."

Verdon ran close to 40 miles a week, instead of the 45 miles senior runners used to put in. While upping the overall mileage, Woolridge has reduced the team's high-intensity training.

"She's the first generation of kids who have run that much. The injuries have gone down. We found it's not the volume that is the issue. It's the race-paced work that was the issue," Woolridge explained.

Concentrating on the mechanical aspect reduced the stress on his runners' bones, ligaments and joints.

"Run with guts," Verdon said, revealing her mantra for the year.

And she needed it, after taking an early fall during the race at the Nationals.

"The course was pretty technical: you had to run on grass, dirt and gravel and there were no flat sections. My race plan was to not get caught going out too fast. I imagined myself falling before the race, which was weird because I don't customarily do that. So it was really strange when I fell, but I got up right away. I was kind of freaking out, but I just looked at the girls in front of me

and picked them off one by one for the rest of the race," Verdon said.

Coach Woolridge spoke of Verdon's incident in terms of her personality. He said, "She's even-keeled and I actually told her just recently that as a runner she's a pretty normal kid. There's a lot of obsessiveness that goes along with being a great athlete and it's to her credit that she's pretty laid back. I was proud of how poised she was and how she kept her composure. She came back in the second half of the race. That says a lot about how she manages her stress in a national competition."

Verdon said she wants to get the team on the podium again next year. "I want to win state and make it to Nationals and try to get in the top ten."

"She's going to be the number three returning athlete, so a top ten finish at the national meet would definitely be an attainable goal," Woolridge predicted. "For the team, I'd like to challenge the girls to repeat as State Champions. They are losing two of our top leaders, Grace Orders and Sara Mostatabi, but Carrie is making cross country at Campolindo a very high profile sport."

Lamorinda Schools

Lamorinda Schools Forced to Look Again at Parcel Tax

By Sophie Braccini

At the December 7 meeting of the Governing Board of the Moraga School District, board members discussed a new parcel tax to bring in much-needed funds to the district. At the same time, Lafayette School District Superintendent Fred Brill indicated that his district will be conducting a poll in early 2011 to study the feasibility of placing a parcel tax measure on the June ballot. While in Orinda, the uncertainty created by the abysmal State deficit, and the resulting cuts, is forcing the otherwise financially solid school district to revisit the question.

The three districts are all grateful of the tremendous effort of Lamorinda communities to compensate for the deterioration of State support, but they continue to be challenged by uncertainty. "We have a new governor in office, and we do not know what kind of budget will be presented in the month to come," said Moraga School District (MSD) Superintendent Bruce Burns. "Our financial status is strong, but our outlook may change within a month when the new governor presents his budget," confirmed Jerry Bucci, Director of Business Services for the Orinda Union School District (OUSD).

In 2004, a \$325 per parcel tax, with no sunset, was approved in Moraga. The yearly \$1.8 million it produced first allowed the District to constitute a \$200,000 reserve per year. But

for three years now, MSD has had to tap into that reserve to compensate for diminishing State funding and cost increases. Projections indicate that the reserve will be exhausted by the 2013-2014 school year.

Last October the MSD Board appointed a Fiscal Advisory Committee that looked at cost reductions and possible increased revenues. "The district has made efforts to cut expenses and saved \$600,000," said Burns. In Lafayette, "We have lost \$1,000 per student in State funding," indicated Brill, "over the past three years, the Governing Board has cut over two million dollars from our budget." But the two superintendents believe that this will not be enough.

"The State may face an \$18 billion deficit over the next 18 months," said Brill, "huge cuts will have to be made, and schools will be impacted." Brill believes that to continue to satisfy a community that has high expectations for its schools, class size should not be increased; the school year should not be shortened; instructional aid should be maintained; arts, music and science programs should not be cut; and student support should be preserved.

"To lessen the impact of the ongoing State budget crisis and stave off draconian cuts to our educational program, the Board and administration are exploring a parcel tax measure to be placed on a ballot this spring.

The Board is sensitive to the economic challenges that many families and businesses are facing, and is being extremely thoughtful about the timing and amount of any tax measure," wrote Brill in a December letter to parents.

Polling company True North Research has been hired by the Lafayette School District and will provide input to the Board in late January regarding residents' positions on a new tax. If the response is positive, a measure could be placed on a mail-in ballot in June of 2011.

MSD and OUSD are not as far along in the process, since neither district anticipates exhausting their reserves earlier than 2013 or 2014, but preliminary work could start rapidly. "For such matters it is better not to be pressured by a timeline," said new MSD Board member Kathy Ransstrom, who recommended the creation of a committee to start exploring options now. Burns proposed that a steering committee be assembled in January and appealed to volunteers in the community.

"We are just beginning our reflection," said OUSD's Bucci, "this is something that we may consider in two years and that our Fiscal Advisory Committee is looking at." Actions in Sacramento in January may accelerate these decisions. "The uncertainty created by the State is our major concern," concluded Bucci.

Secret Snowflake – Kids Giving to Kids

... continued from page A1



JM's Leadership students wrap hundreds of gifts. Photo Jerry Gruen

Seventh grader Patrick Hayes heard the call. "I wanted to go to Cambridge and help the kids – coming up short (of gifts) would have really sucked for them and for me," he explains. Hayes and his mom, Connie, discussed ways he might be able to raise money to buy toys. Armed with a pledge of matching funds from Connie, Hayes sold his GameCube and old games, and some friends' old games, at GameStop – he added in \$100 from his own savings and headed to Toys R Us. "I think we probably bought 50 toys!" he happily reports. "It really feels right, because I haven't donated to charity that much," reflects Hayes, who is planning an even greater effort next year.

Other families responded in the kind. More kids donated toys; kids who had already brought in

toys showed up with yet more toys. "One mom brought in between 75 and 100 gifts herself," says Lorie, "and many others donated hundreds of dollars to fund the gap." JM's front office staff fielded calls from parents on the last donation day, some of whom were calling from stores, asking what types of toys were still needed.

Finally, a happier message went out: "Thank you for helping us meet our 2010 Secret Snowflake goal!"

The Secret Snowflake program began nine years ago when Lorie's wife, Amanda, who taught at Rheem Elementary before the couple's first child was born, was doing her student teaching at Cambridge. "The first year we aimed to buy gifts for the kids in her class and we

ended up with enough gifts for the entire 1st grade. By the fourth year we had covered the whole school," recalls Lorie.

In addition to giving kids a chance to help other kids who are less fortunate, Secret Snowflake is a lesson in teamwork. "The program wouldn't function without Jerry Gruen," Lorie states. "He runs the Leadership class - his Leadership kids are invaluable."

Gruen explains, "The Leadership class spends the three weeks before the break working on the Snowflake project and is responsible for processing the gifts once they get to JM. Basically, we sort, wrap, and bag the gifts for each class. We keep a running total of what we have received and what we still need; this we communicate to the school and community. Because we deliver 800+ gifts; it is a really big job."

"When it comes down to it, it's the families in the community that make this program such a success," Lorie concludes. "We could be the most organized wrappers or best cheerleaders in the world, but if the families don't support the program with their donations, we wouldn't be having this discussion. Every year I am amazed by the community's support."

And every year, the kids at Cambridge Elementary get at least one new toy for Christmas.

Send sports stories and ideas to:
sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com



JM students brought gifts to Cambridge Elementary on Dec. 17.

Photo Amanda Lorie

Acalanes High School • Bentley School • Burton Valley • Camino Pablo Campolindo • Contra Costa Jewish Day School • Del Rey Donald L. Rheem • Glorietta • Happy Valley • Joaquin Moraga

Lamorinda Schools

Lafayette Elementary • Los Perales • Miramonte • Orinda Academy Orinda Intermediate • Saklan Valley School • Sleepy Hollow Springhill • Stanley Middle • St. Perpetua School • Wagner Ranch

Campo Student Makes Major Music

By Cathy Dausman



Inno Asuncion Photo Doug Dunderdale

To borrow a phrase from a Frank Sinatra song, Inno Asuncion has the world on a string. Make that four strings – four viola strings. The Campolindo High School senior is co-president of the Student Music Council, a member of the Campolindo Orchestra, plays in a string quartet and manages a music mentor program for Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. He is also assistant principal violist in the Berkeley based Young People's Symphony Orchestra. Asuncion, along with three other YPSO musicians, performed in December with the Berkeley Symphony. YPSO and other youth orchestras will play in Davies Symphony Hall in January.

A love for music performances began in third grade, when Asuncion's class took a field trip to hear the San Francisco Symphony. In sixth grade he began studying violin under Joaquin Moraga Middle

School's music teacher Adam Noel, but quickly switched to viola. It was, he says, "a very good decision."

Flash forward to high school, where Campolindo music director Harvey Benstein urged Asuncion to audition for YPSO. Asuncion was accepted, and has continued to rehearse and perform with their group of 100 musicians. This is his third year with the program.

As Asuncion's music contacts have broadened, so have his opportunities. He's played in a chamber ensemble, in Berkeley's Jr. Bach Festival, performed with the Pacific Mozart Ensemble choir, and for the Bay Area Youth Orchestra festival. Last June he traveled with YPSO to Alaska, performing in Fairbanks and Anchorage. He'd like to play in Campolindo's pit orchestra (their March musical will be "Fiddler on the Roof"), but right now he's focused on an April inter-

national field trip to Beijing, China. The Chinese Ministry of Culture and the International Fine Arts Institute invited Campolindo Orchestra to perform. He says nearly fifty Campolindo music students will make the trip. Fundraisers for travel expenses are ongoing, most famously the Rent-a-Student program (see related story in our December 8 issue.)

Bow in hand, Asuncion averages an hour or two daily of music practice. Right now it's more, as he prepares an audition for Stanford University. Admittedly, he spends more time on non music-related homework. But he likes music and says he finds that it "provides relief from academics," and teaches him "how to be a leader." Does he play any other instruments? "The ukulele," he laughs. In addition to his studies and music commitments Asuncion also plays varsity tennis.

Asuncion studies viola privately with Pamela Freund-Striplen. He credits the teachers he's had and his parents, Melinda and Albert Asuncion, for the support they've provided to his music career. Younger sister Gabriela, a Joaquin Moraga sixth grader, has taken up the cello after watching her brother's successes.

Music "might take me somewhere in college," he says thoughtfully. It seems it already has.

To learn more about the Campolindo Orchestra 2011 China Trip go online to <http://campomusic.org/china-trip-info/>

SCHOOL CALENDAR

Acalanes Union
High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Wednesday, January 12, 7:30pm

Lafayette School District
LAFSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Wednesday, January 12, 7pm

Orinda Union School District
OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, January 10, 4pm

Moraga School District
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, January 11, at 7:30pm

Lafayette Unified School District Kindergarten Registration
Registration for Lafayette students entering Kindergarten for the 2011-2012 school year will take place on Tuesday, January 25 and Wednesday, January 26, 2011, at the following times (please go to the school in your attendance area to register):

Burton Valley Elementary,
9-11am and 1-3pm
561 Merriewood Drive, 927-3550

Springhill Elementary,
9-11am
3301 Springhill Road, 927-3580

Happy Valley Elementary,
8:30-11:30am and 1-3pm
3855 Happy Valley Road, 927-3560

Information regarding registration requirements and attendance areas is available at www.lafsd.k12.ca.us.

Lafayette Elementary,
9am-noon
950 Moraga Road, 927-3570

'Tis the Season to Hurry Up and Wait

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

While there are still a few college application deadlines coming up in January, the majority of students have submitted their applications and are settling in for a long wait. The months between sending out college applications and waiting for admission decisions in the spring can seem like an eternity. The drama that accompanied writing essays and standardized testing is finally over and it seems that there is nothing left to do. This sudden drop in levels of activity and excitement can be a disappointing end to such a big build up. So, instead of just sitting around a waiting, be proactive! There are some constructive things seniors should still do to improve their chances of admission and get prepared for funding their college education.

- Continue to do your best academic work. Colleges review final transcripts to be certain no courses were dropped and grades did not plummet.
- Visit schools you have not been able to see. If visiting is impossible, continue to familiarize yourself with colleges in other ways in order to make informed decisions when the time comes. Demonstrated interest continues to be a factor in a school's admission decisions.
- Identify the undergraduate regional admissions officer who is responsible for your application. E-mail or call to let him or her check if your application has been received; do not do this, however, if you have already received confirmation of receipt. Instead ask if your application is complete and if there is anything else they will need.
- Stay engaged in researching your top colleges. Read blogs, examine course catalogues, review housing considerations, email faculty, students and prospective students through social networking sites and in discussions. Your regional admission officer may be a member or may just drop in to check who's there.

Financial Aid Should Never be an Afterthought

Many colleges award federal and institutional aid on a first-come, first-served basis, so it is important to get your FAFSA filed within the first couple of weeks of January. The FAFSA or Free Application for Federal Student Aid is an application that you fill out and submit online. The government and college(s) use the information to determine what your family's financial aid award will be. The award is made up of one or more scholarships, grants, work-study and/or loans. The U.S. Department of Education administers the FAFSA and the 2011-2012 application becomes available at www.fafsa.ed.gov on January 1st. Every family should file a FAFSA, regardless of family income. Many colleges and universities, state and federal governments as well as private scholarship sponsors require the FAFSA in order for you to qualify for aid. At some colleges, students will not be eligible to receive merit aid unless a FAFSA is submitted. Merit aid awards are not need-based; they are tied to the student's achievement record rather than to family finances. Merit awards are incentives colleges use to encourage good students to accept an offer of admission by helping to reduce the costs of college.

Get started early on the FAFSA application process. Here are three important steps to add to your New Year's Resolutions:

1. Apply for a PIN (your electronic signature) for both you and your student (or retrieve an old one if you already filed a FAFSA. One parent and the student need to have a PIN to electronically sign the FAFSA.
2. Review the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet to understand what information you will need to complete FAFSA; gather that information so you have it all in one place.
3. Use income estimates (both the family and the student) for 2010; do not wait to have your

completed 2010 tax returns. Estimates are acceptable and you will need to update the FAFSA when your tax returns are prepared.

Beyond the first-come, first-served advantage, there are several other good reasons for starting early and staying on top of the FAFSA. First, beginning the FAFSA early in the season makes later updates easier to manage. The government has designed an easy to use website for this purpose. Second, information on the FAFSA can easily be transferred to the PROFILE, a second application for financial aid used by hundreds of private institutions.

Here's a bit of holiday inspiration to get you started!

Deck the halls with boughs of holly.

*Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la.
'Tis the season to be jolly!
Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la.*

*Write your FAFSA,
Prep your PROFILE,
Have your taxes done,
Yesterday!*

*Just as the Yule season passes,
Push 'submit' and pray for aid!*



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an educational consultant and certified college admissions advisor. Her goal is to help students and their families understand the admissions process, research college and career options, create a customized college list and submit a strong and cohesive application. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC, and HECA and earned a certification in College Admissions and Career Planning from University of California at Berkeley. Contact her at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

Lafayette Girl Broadens International Horizons

By Jean Follmer



Marie Teichman's interest in foreign languages and countries began at a very young age. She studied French for eight years before beginning her Spanish studies in the 8th grade at Stanley Middle School. Now a junior at Acalanes High School, Teichman is in Spanish 4.

Teichman took her first international exchange trip during the summer of 2008. Traveling to Japan with five other students, she spent three weeks living with a host family and touring with the exchange group. When Teichman returned to Lafayette, she was ready to start planning her next trip.

Teichman's father, a Chevron employee, learned his company offered scholarships through an international exchange group called *Youth for Understanding*. He encouraged her to apply to the Amer-

ican branch.

"I really wanted to go to Brazil," said Teichman. After completing five 250-word essays, sharing her hobbies, extra-curricular activities and school records, she won the opportunity to fulfill her desire. "The application process was pretty extensive. It was probably harder than college applications. We were asked to reflect on the past and answer questions about what you would do in certain situations," Teichman shared.

According to the *Youth for Understanding* website, the organization's mission is "preparing young people for their responsibilities and opportunities in a changing and interdependent world." YFU works with governments, corporations, foundations schools and educators worldwide to create global learning opportunities.

Teichman spent six weeks in Brazil as a *Youth for Understanding* exchange student last summer. She was placed with a family that has two daughters – ages 16 and 7. Teichman assimilated quickly. "After the first week, you're part of the family life," she said.

Since both parents worked and the daughters were in school most of the time, Teichman did most of her sightseeing on her

own. "It was pure integration. I was lucky because my host father was an English teacher. I actually picked up a lot of Portuguese by the end of my visit – many words sound alike between Portuguese and Spanish," she reflected.

And pure integration was the point of the trip. Students from throughout America met in Washington, D.C. to depart for Brazil. Unlike some exchange programs, the students were spread throughout Brazil. It was only by chance that Teichman was placed within walking distance of an American girl from the east coast.

Teichman feels it was a life-changing experience. "You have to take charge and be responsible for yourself; you have to do a lot of planning. I know it's hard to leave home for six weeks but it prepares you for life," she said.

There is little doubt Teichman will be prepared for life when she leaves home in a couple of years. As for the future, she loves both biology and languages and envisions continuing her involvement in those areas. And as for travel, "I really want to go to a Spanish-speaking country next," finished Teichman.

For more information on *Youth for Understanding*, visit <http://yfiusa.org/>.

Lamorinda Weekly

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- State Champions! Campolindo Volleyball Takes the Title
- Gardening at the Movies
- Going, Going...Sold
- Lafayette Home a Christmas Extravaganza
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Photo Ohlen Alexander

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