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We Knew it All Along

GreatSchools.org ranks Lamorinda schools among the best

By Sophie Braccini

Did you hear that Lamorinda has the best schools around? A recent Forbes magazine article has been all the buzz of late, and generated national attention to results compiled by a non-profit organization, GreatSchools.org, that aims to inform parents about where to find the best schools in relation to where they can afford to buy a house. GreatSchools.org goes a step further and looks beyond the test scores in an attempt to capture the whole school experience. They note that although only quantifiable data can lead to rankings, there is more to a school experience than high test scores.

The Moraga School District gets the bragging rights to being the 6th best district in the nation, according to the Forbes article. The Lafayette and Orinda school districts ranked among the top 10 in California.

These ratings are the result of GreatSchools.org's compilation of two sets of data: Results from Standardized Testing and Reporting (California's STAR tests) or the equivalent in each state, combined with the results from the most recent National Assessment for Educational Progress data, a federal program that tests randomly selected students in fourth, eighth and 12th grades to provide state-level assessments of learning and educational progress. Every year, GreatSchool.org releases national results, ranking schools districts nationally, and per home price range,

allowing Americans to find the best schools for their buck.

All of GreatSchools.org's top 10 best school districts nationwide for 2011 present very consistent demographic profiles. They are small (10,000-37,000 people), the percentage of minority students is very low (with the exception of Moraga and Mercer Island, WA, in which Asians represent over 10% of the student population), and the residents are mostly affluent. Falmouth, Maine, Barrington, Rhode Island and Pella, Iowa (ranked 1st, 4th and 3rd respectively) are a bit more average with about 3% of the families below the poverty level, and average incomes below \$100,000. In the top spot, Falmouth, Maine, the median home value is \$351,550. Falmouth claims a low student-teacher ratio (12:1), a generous dollars-per-pupil spent of \$10,075, and a highly-educated staff (more than 60 percent of teachers have at least a master's degree). In comparison, according to Moraga Superintendent Bruce Burns, his district spends \$8,700 per student.

"The school districts we've highlighted in our line-up of top cities to live and learn have an abundance of key assets: devoted teachers, challenging curricula, and vibrant cultures of achievement," says GreatSchools.org's Connie Matthiessen, "but there's one important quality almost all of these areas lack, and that's racial diversity." She

adds, "Ironically, while our schools are becoming more segregated, our society is becoming ever more diverse. Some 44 percent of American students today are nonwhite, and that number rises every year."

GreatSchools.org strives to provide information beyond the test scores. "There are ways for teachers and principals to enrich their profile; parents and students participate on the site as well," says GreatSchools.org's Kristan Kirsh, "Principals are excited to add content and we moderate it. We have 37 million unique visitors a year, 20% of which are students."

The organization's staff also does its own research – Jessica Kelmon, Associate Editor for GreatSchools.org, who researches clusters of excellence (such as Lamorinda), recently interviewed Lafayette School District Superintendent Fred Brill. "I just ask open-ended question," she says, "we want to find out what's unique about the area and the schools, the level of parental engagement, the number of parents in classrooms, the level of support for school parcel taxes. There is more to a school than just the numbers measured by a test, and we try to offer a full picture, so parents can choose the best school for each of their children."

For more information go to: <http://www.greatschools.org/find-a-school/4083-best-cities-2011-clusters-of-excellence.gs?page=1>

OIS Debate Team Comes out on Top

Submitted by Pat Sokalski



Photo provided

The Orinda Intermediate School Debate Team took Second Place at the National Middle School Debate Tournament in Los Angeles. Representing OIS was the team of Sean McFeely, Noah Bostick, and

Andrew Bower (pictured standing in front row). The OIS debaters won all five rounds. They then competed against Chaminade College Preparatory (a private school) in a final public round attended by about 700 people.

The topic was "Hate speech should not be protected by Free Speech." All together, the OIS team brought back ten trophies. The win makes the OIS team the number one public middle school team in the nation.

Wagner Ranch Presents Fiddler on the Roof Jr.

Submitted by Jennifer Wallace



Photo provided

Lights, camera, action! Wagner Ranch Elementary School proudly presents its annual spring musical, Fiddler on the Roof Jr., on Friday, June 3rd and Saturday, June 4th. This heartwarming production is a junior adaptation of the original

1964 Broadway musical. The 4th and 5th grade cast and crew has been working hard for months to make this an experience you won't soon forget. Audiences of all ages will love this play directed by Ron Pickett and produced by Susie Parr and Lynn

Molloy. Tickets for the four shows are available online at: showtix4u.com or through a link on the school website at www.orindaschools.org/wagner-ranch. Tickets may also be purchased at the door.

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In Memory

Marietta Dunaway



December 17, 1952 – April 20, 2011
Moraga, California

Marietta Dunaway died peacefully at her home, surrounded by her family on April 20th.

In addition to being a devoted mother and wife, Marietta was a gifted teacher and scientist. She grew up in Borger, Texas and received her PhD from Rice University in Biochemistry. She did postdoctoral work at the Fred Hutchison Cancer Research Center on the

control of the transcription of genes into RNA. She was an Adjunct and Assistant Professor of Molecular and Cell Biology at UC Berkeley beginning in 1985. Her best known paper explores the long-range interactions of DNA sequences in the promotion of transcription: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2797192>.

In 2001 Marietta chose to bring her teaching skills and love of science to the high school classroom. She was most recently a teacher at Campolindo High School in Moraga, where she will be long-remembered and respected for her tremendous dedication, intelligence, wit, caring attitude, superb teaching methods, and friendship.

Marietta was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2005 but continued to teach effectively, accommodating chemotherapy regimens so that she could recover during the weekends and teach during the week. She never complained and met each day with a smile. After leaving Campolindo on March 28th, she went home under the care of the Hospice of the East Bay and her family.

Marietta was predeceased by her parents Stewart and Wanda Dunaway, and her brother Robert.

She is survived by her devoted husband, Richard Harland, and her two loving sons, Christopher and Marcus.

The family suggests sending donations in Marietta's memory to the Lymphatic Research Foundation. An underappreciated result of removal of lymph nodes in many cancer patients is the loss of fluid drainage and consequent swelling of the legs or arms. There is currently no way to replace the lymph vessels, and support is needed for public awareness and research.

A memorial service will be held 6:30 – 9:00 PM on Monday, May 16th at Moraga Hacienda, 2100 Donald Drive, Moraga.

Submit stories to

schooldesk@lamorindaweekly.com