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Support Your City: Buy Your Gas Locally

By *Sophie Braccini*

When Sue Breedlove's gas tank is nearing empty, she usually goes to a service station in the town where she works. Breedlove, the President of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce, is not the only one. Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Lafayette Chamber, does the same and so does Edy Schwartz, President of the Moraga Chamber.

For them it is second nature; they just shop local. "I'm trying to practice what we preach," says Breedlove. Looking at the numbers, it seems that only half of the population does the same. Bringing the gasoline business back home would add significant sales tax revenue for each local government.

Let's look at the numbers. In Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, about 1/2 of the population get their gas outside of their city. (Source: Muni Services report - Lafayette 48%, Moraga 49% and Orinda 52%). Municipalities get back only a fraction of the sales tax that is paid on gas within their boundaries, but at the end of the year, it adds up: between \$130,000 and \$210,000 depending on the city. This amount could be added to a city's General Fund if everyone committed to buying their gas where they live. "I would love that," commented Orinda Finance Director Emily Hobby.

"I buy my gas at Costco, it is cheaper there," said a Lamorinda resident who didn't want to be identified. What makes the price of gas? According to Moe Mojaddidi, who runs the Chevron station at the corner of Moraga Way and Moraga Road, it is the brand owner that sets the price. "They charge each station a different price, depending on the rent they pay to the property owner and the distance between the station and the refinery," he says. Stations that don't sell brand name gas can shop around for the lowest price. Mojaddidi believes that the additives in brand name gas equate to better engine performance and are worth paying a bit more for.

"Buying local is what we are about," concludes Orinda Chamber Executive Director Candy Kattenburg, "and I am looking forward to stopping at the new Flying A gas station that Orinda Motors is opening where the Valero station was."

Gas Stations Come and Go:

In Moraga, the Shell station that was located at 1405 Moraga Way lost its lease and moved out its equipment, including the only car wash in town. Over by Rheem, the gas station located at 425 Moraga Road (northeast corner at the intersection of Moraga Rd and Rheem Boulevard), that was entangled in a complex financial situation, is now under contract by a new owner, William Nasser of Walnut Creek, who received approval from the Town of Moraga to modify the convenience store and add a car wash. According to real estate broker Dave Schnayer, the transaction could be complete within 45-60 days. The station will re-open while the improvements are in progress.

In Orinda, Allen Pennebaker, the owner of Orinda Motors, is getting ready to open a new Flying A gas station on September, near the Theater Square onramp to Highway 24. "This is full circle for Orinda Motors, which had a gas pump in the '70s," says Pennebaker, "with the addition of this new station we will be offering a complete range of services- everything that involves cars," including detailing service. According to Pennebaker, Flying A, based in Santa Rosa, is making a comeback in the Bay Area.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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