

Q&A With MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley

By Lucy Amaral



Nearly two years ago, Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) hired Randy Bradley as its new Fire Chief. He faced pension issues, an economic downturn and a community concerned about the management of the District. Today, some of those challenges remain, some have improved and some new issues have surfaced. In this first of two parts, we recently posed questions regarding these and other topics to the Chief.

Q. How has the economy affected the District?

A. Unfortunately the District has experienced about a \$1.5 million decrease in spending power over the past two years. This is primarily due to a significant increase in retirement costs and a reduction in assessed property values, which reduces our property tax revenues. We have been able to maintain our primary service levels through renegotiating service contracts, leaving a Battalion Chief's position vacant, eliminating several staff positions, and, firefighters not receiving raises for the past three years. A small increase in ambulance revenues, cost recovery for vehicle accidents and the use of some of our reserves has allowed the District to maintain service levels.

Q. You came into the job knowing there were several hot-button is-

sues. What have you found yourself dealing with that wasn't expected?

A. After about a month in my new position, the Orinda City Council was presented with a proposal to detach from the Fire District and contract with Contra Costa County Consolidated Fire District and American Medical Response for fire and emergency medical services. The group predicted that revenues would increase during the next ten years and the excess would be available to address road and water issues in Orinda. I spent a lot of time evaluating their proposal, the District's fire protection/EMS Model, meeting with the public, LAFCO, City and Town Councils, Fire Districts and County Supervisors explaining the value of our model and their proposal's negative impact on service levels.

My conclusion was that while we live in a rural-like community we expect and even demand urban and suburban service levels. Having well trained, well-equipped, experienced firefighter paramedics arrive within five minutes of a 911 call is a high priority for a vast majority of the citizens within the District. Meeting the five-minute response goal requires five fire stations. Similar-sized communities with higher housing densities and less open space may only require two or three fire stations to meet response times.

The road and water pipe problems in Orinda exist for similar reasons and some in the community would argue that urban roads and water pipes are now a larger priority than suburban fire protection. We believe that the vast majority continue to place a higher priority on fire and medical response capabilities. However, the District has a vested interest in improving the roads and water systems in both communities and we will work with both communities to identify funding mechanisms without de-

creasing fire protection and EMS services.

With that said, the group that was proposing an alternative model no longer supports dissolving the District. I have met several times with the group's members and the meetings have been very respectful. They believe that their ideas are in the best interest of the community and we respectfully agree to disagree.

Q. How is the District addressing its unfunded pension liability?

A. We are currently evaluating several options. One being considered is to encumber future revenues realized from new development. While this has merit, we need to be careful due to our continued decrease in property values. We may need new development revenues to maintain service levels in the future. We are also negotiating with our labor union to potentially change the retiree health benefit, which would drastically reduce that retiree medical (GASB 45) unfunded liability. The union is evaluating and proposing other options to address unfunded liabilities, which will be considered through the collective bargaining process. They understand the importance of addressing our unfunded liabilities and they have worked collaboratively to identify options.

Q. The long-term forecast from the 9/1 MOFD finance committee meeting shows a sharp decrease in available funds as early as 2013/14, with a negative total balance showing for the first time. How will MOFD address this issue, considering the increase in pension contributions and a still unfunded GASB 45?

A. In the next year, the District will be working on a new Strategic Business plan with a strong finance component. That process will help identify future finance options to ensure we maintain our service levels and begin to address our unfunded li-

abilities. We will continue to evaluate operations to improve efficiencies and keep an eye on assessed property values. We will also continue to meet and confer with our union to ensure we have a stable workforce with sustainable service levels. The unfunded liabilities will take some time to completely address. The District inherited the drivers of many of the unfunded liabilities prior to the requirement to evaluate retiree medical as an unfunded liability. We currently pay over \$3 million annually towards unfunded liabilities (pensions) and that is not enough.

Next: The Chief answers questions regarding perceived funding inequities, MOFD accomplishments and future goals.



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:

Next regular MOFD Board meeting is November 16, 7:00pm, Station 41 (1280 Moraga Way, Moraga), (go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for more information)

MOFD Seeks Public Input on Station 43 Replacement

Submitted by Mike Mentink

The MoragaOrinda Fire District has started a planning process to replace Station 43 which is located at 20 Via Las Cruces in Orinda. The existing fire station, which is over sixty years old, needs to be rebuilt because it does not meet seismic standards, modern fire apparatus does not fit in the apparatus bays, and the living area does not adequately accommodate mixed gender staffing. The old station will be torn down and a new station will be built in its place.

"The District is interested in the public's input relating to this proj-

ect," said Fire Chief Randall Bradley, "We will be holding several public meetings during the course of the project to provide information and receive comments about the design of the station."

The first of these meetings will be held on November 17, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. at 20 Via Las Cruces (Station 43) in Orinda. The purpose of the open house is to allow the neighborhood and the community to view the existing station, discuss the planning process, and meet the Fire Chief, his reconstruction team and the project architects.

Share your thoughts, insights and opinions with your community.
Send a letter to the editor:
letters@lamorindaweekly.com

Dad Left his Beret in France

Born and raised in Paris, he witnessed WWII through the eyes of his older brothers who fought in the French Resistance. After the war, this youngest son was sent to America by a mother who believed there was only one place left in the world with a future.

Dad's love of his new country came quick and ran deep. When the Korean War broke out, though not yet a US citizen, he joined the fight.

Over the years I learned so much from him, nothing fancy but what could be more valuable than: work hard, be honest, show respect.

Now I've watched over dad for years as he's needed help with daily tasks, like food prep, housework, and transportation. Lately, living by himself has got him down and I've grown too exhausted to care for my own household's needs.

If an elderly parent depends on you for daily assistance – maybe they're not independent any more.

Please consider Aegis Living. We are the trusted local senior care provider specializing in assisted living and memory care. We offer the finest care, given by the most committed staff. Come in for a tour and lunch with your parent. Let them experience our community filled with warmth and new friends.

Call the community nearest you for an appointment or more information.

Visit www.aegisliving.com/VA_Benefits to learn about applying for the Veterans benefits they deserve. Or contact your local Aegis Living community to learn more.



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