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Moraga's Johnny Redwood Seed

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First plant. From left: Bernie, Mike O'Brien and Kevin Humann, 1981



Kevin Bernie on right

Photos provided

And plant he did, starting with a section in front of St. Mary's Gardens, where his parents moved after he started college next door.

In 1981, he contacted the East Bay Municipal Utility District and Contra Costa County Sanitary District for approval to plant 30 Aptos Blue Redwoods along the entrance to St. Mary's Gardens. Then he approached 124 homeowners, asking for donations to buy saplings.

Many asked him, "What's in it for you?" He simply replied, "It makes me happy."

Bernie also figured that an affluent community like Moraga would pass laws to protect the trees. It took six months, but he gained approval and funding.

The earth was so tough when the first holes were dug that Bernie stood atop the auger in order to break ground. Those trees have grown to

nearly 100 feet, he said, under the watchful eye of his brother Dan, Moraga's Public Works and Parks Superintendent.

It's likely they'll continue "reaching for the stars," said Bernie, crediting his brother with keeping the saplings alive. "It's one thing to plant a seed[ling]," Bernie said, "but Dan has been able to 'stick around and water it.'"

Bernie planted 50 more trees in 1988 – the same year that two U.C. Berkeley students attempted to harvest a 15-foot redwood tree for Christmas at their fraternity house. Moraga Police caught them in the act and the pair made financial restitution for their "youthful indiscretion."

At first, it was just Bernie and friends Mike O'Brien, Kevin Humann and John Holroyd who planted trees. Later Bernie enlisted town residents, volunteers from Youth for Environmental Action (YEA) and Saint Mary's College. In 1991, Bernie and his volunteers planted 125 Aptos Blue Redwoods on the north side of St. Mary's Road near the Moraga library.

Seventy-five more trees followed in 1992 and another 20 were planted along Moraga Boulevard across from Campolindo High School in 1993. To celebrate those plantings, they held an environmental fair and music fest at Saint Mary's Redwood Amphitheater. The fair, "Redwood Rage," ran for three years.

The man who loves trees and admires John Muir and his mentor Galen Clark simply hopes that the people he's involved in the redwood plantings "drive a little slower" through the developing glade. Sounding a bit like a character from the movie *Avatar*, Bernie said with a smile, "The secret to long life is in the trees."

Civic News orinda

Of Fences and Neighbors

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But it was the specter of safety issues that truly took center stage – potential delays by Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) if firemen must leave trucks to unlock the gate en route to house fires, emergency personnel blocked from even getting to the gate by UPS trucks that sometimes block the structure while transferring packages between vehicles, residents unable to evacuate in the event of an emergency, and the most worrisome for many – the possibility that ambulances and paramedics would lose precious, life-saving seconds to administer oxygen or CPR while driving an alternate route or wrestling with the gate.

When one resident said that an additional 20 seconds to unlock the gate would not add much response time in light of the security benefits the gate conferred, another countered

with the image of a child choking on a carrot, unable to breathe.

The structure does, in fact, present an obstacle according to MOFD Chief Randy Bradley. The gate has been vandalized – allegedly by Orinda residents – and then reinforced repeatedly over the years by City staff, becoming so sturdy that it is no longer "crashable" by fire trucks responding to an emergency, he explained.

Council members also learned from Bradley, however, that the paramedics most likely to assist Knickerbocker-Stein Way residents would in all reality not face gate-related delays. Primary crew members on ambulance calls for this area are actually dispatched from MOFD's downtown station and travel the non-gated route.

Bradley posed one possible solution – employing an automated gate that could be opened by a device sim-

ilar to a garage door opener. Such an upgrade would be problematic, though, because the gate's reinforcements are too heavy and the cost for the fix would be high – \$25,000 to \$30,000.

When asked for his take, Orinda Police Chief Jeffrey Jennings noted that, for the gate to truly thwart crime, it would need to be guarded. Analyses have also shown a negligible impact on traffic. The greatest benefits of having the gate removed, he said, would likely come through residents and police having an easier time of leaving and entering during any emergency.

Cautious Council members delayed "splitting the baby" in Solomon-like fashion and, instead, sent staff back to the stacks to dig for documents to help them craft a deft, down-the-road decision to satisfy all concerned.



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