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Spirit Van Program Seeks Friends with Funds in Moraga

Program coordinator asks Moraga Town Council for additional support

By Sophie Braccini

Mary Bruns gave a compelling presentation when she came to ask the Moraga Town Council for additional funds for the Lamorinda Spirit Van program on May 23. As she does every year Bruns, the coordinator of the program that take seniors to appointments and to run errands, came to the Council meeting to report on how the \$9,000 the Town contributed last year was spent, and to ask for \$12,500 this year due to the increasing costs of running the program.

Bruns was accompanied by one of the van's volunteer drivers and two Moraga passengers who testified to its usefulness. However, the Council refused to increase the Town's donation amount; instead, it encouraged Bruns to seek other sources of funding.

"When I lost my driver's license I stopped going out and became depressed," Yoshi Weber, a frail, senior Moraga resident told the Council. "Then my daughter told me about the Lamorinda Spirit Van and now I am going back to my art class." Weber was followed at the podium by Heather Bransbury, a wheelchair-bound Moragan who explained that the Spirit Van was her only way to get to her appointments. "As the population gets older, this service will become even more valuable," she said.

During her presentation Bruns projected that by 2020, 25 percent of Moraga's population will be senior citizens. The Spirit Van is funded by the three communities, Moraga, Orinda and Lafayette, and by the riders who pay \$5 per trip. Lafayette makes the largest contribution and Orinda the smallest. Bruns indicated that in 2011 the Spirit Van made 450 trips for Moraga residents. She also said that the program is trying to purchase a second vehicle, a mini-van, and that it would welcome more business from Moragans. She asked the Town to increase its contribution, mostly to cover mounting operating costs, a consequence of higher gas prices.

"If you look at what towns contribute per ride, Moraga pays the most," said Mayor Mike Metcalf as he looked at the facts provided by Bruns. "You need to make this presentation in Orinda."

No Council member was willing to add \$3,500 per year for the program. Bruns was asked if she had approached local service groups such as Kiwanis and Rotary-she replied that she had applied to them but received no support. Three members of the board of directors of the non-profit Lamorinda Dogs who came to the meeting hoping to encourage the Council to reconsider its decision regarding plans for an off-leash dog area at Rancho Laguna Park, to no avail, were impressed by the presentation and decided to make a \$500 donation.

"Jeanne Moreau, Blair Newell and I were touched as you discussed your mission," said Lamorinda Dogs' Bill Carman later. "We requested unanimous approval from our directors to donate the sum of \$500 to help you keep the people who built our community mobile." He also asked her if the Spirit Van could help transport seniors to the group's farewell barbecue party at Rancho Laguna Park on June 2.

For more information about the Lamorinda Spirit Van Program contact Mary Bruns at mbruns@ci.lafayette.ca.us or (925) 283-3534.

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