

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 06 Issue 26 Wednesday, February 27, 2013



Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

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After Tough Winter, Good Buzz So Far *Update on the local honey business*

By Cathy Tyson



Hive inspection

Photos Cathy Tyson

Last year was challenging for Lamorinda bees. Mike Vigo, also known as the Bee Rancher, described 2012 as “one of the more difficult years of beekeeping,” but he says he is looking forward to the spring nectar flow of 2013.

Vigo was still relatively new to the honey business, having made a dramatic change from his prior career as a securities professional when we reported on him in June, 2012. He admits it’s been frustrating. Since 2006, beekeepers throughout California and beyond have reported unexplained losses of hives. Despite many local hive impediments, “customers are very excited,” said the ranch foreman. “They love the process.”

Publishers of the Lamorinda Weekly, Andy and Wendy Scheck had a hive setback over the winter. It was like Christmas morning when the hive was delivered last June, the homeowners ready for the new arrivals, with a wood bee box in a protected location that receives morning sun.

The colony seemed to be thriving, but inexplicably, Andy Scheck said, “We were queen-less for a while and lost a good chunk of our bees.” Thankfully

Vigo had a spare colony, a new queen and drones that successfully merged; this was confirmed by a recent check-up visit by the Bee Rancher, who verified the colony was back on track.

If all goes well, the Schecks should have a bountiful honey harvest in June and again in September.

Although the family enjoys home-grown honey, Scheck said his real goal is to keep the bee population up. Colony collapse disorder is a serious concern and having an ample bee population is critical to pollinate fruit and nut trees – especially almonds.

Visiting on an unusually warm day in mid-February, Vigo exclaimed the Schecks’ hive looks fantastic with “evidence of a very prolific queen” – a positive sign, since a queen honey bee can lay up to 1,500 eggs per day. He predicts the population is really going to grow dramatically in the next month or so.

One mite was found on visual inspection of the Schecks’ hive, but there’s always more, cautioned Vigo. Varroa destructor is an external parasitic mite, causing varroaosis by attaching to bees and sucking their blood.

...continued on page D4



Bee Rancher Mike Vigo holding a frame

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LAFAYETTE ~ COMING SOON DESIRABLE HAPPY VALLEY LOCATION

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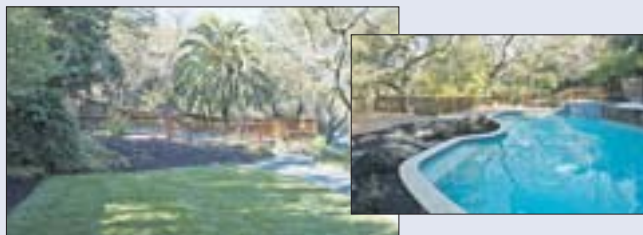
beauty of its almost one-acre pristine lot. 20 foot ceilings, a chef's kitchen, gorgeous aged beams, Connecticut blue stone pavers, wisteria-covered arbor, rose garden, and meandering pathways create this magnificent one-of-a-kind estate.



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Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

City	Last reported:	LOWEST AMOUNT:	HIGHEST AMOUNT:
LAFAYETTE	13	\$330,000	\$1,950,000
MORAGA	1	\$850,000	\$850,000
ORINDA	1	\$742,000	\$742,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal REsource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California REsource. Neither Cal REsource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

LAFAYETTE

55 Hidden Oaks Drive, \$2,515,000, 4 Bdrms, 4311 SqFt, 2006 YrBlT, 1-24-13;

Previous Sale: \$2,800,000, 10-02-06

3367 McGraw Lane, \$1,740,000, 4 Bdrms, 3734 SqFt, 1969 YrBlT, 1-25-13;

Previous Sale: \$1,800,000, 11-28-00

3636 Mosswood Drive, \$685,000, 3 Bdrms, 1349 SqFt, 1951 YrBlT, 1-22-13

3175 Surmont Drive, \$1,375,000, 4 Bdrms, 2828 SqFt, 1975 YrBlT, 1-29-13;

Previous Sale: \$450,000, 03-27-89

MORAGA

822 Augusta Drive, \$625,000, 2 Bdrms, 1743 SqFt, 1979 YrBlT, 1-15-13

35 Campolindo Court, \$1,150,000, 4 Bdrms, 2690 SqFt, 1972 YrBlT, 1-18-13;

Previous Sale: \$245,000, 03-18-87

770 Country Club Drive, \$565,000, 3 Bdrms, 1749 SqFt, 1973 YrBlT, 1-18-13;

Previous Sale: \$460,000, 09-05-12

2 Miramonte Drive, \$380,000, 3 Bdrms, 1447 SqFt, 1964 YrBlT, 1-24-13;

Previous Sale: \$198,000, 06-22-94

ORINDA

695 Ironbark Circle, \$1,680,000, 2 Bdrms, 3256 SqFt, 1977 YrBlT, 1-23-13;

Previous Sale: \$1,260,000, 05-13-05

49 Longridge Road, \$905,000, 4 Bdrms, 2127 SqFt, 1992 YrBlT, 1-18-13;

Previous Sale: \$889,000, 05-18-10

112 Moraga Way, \$1,225,000, 4 Bdrms, 2868 SqFt, 2001 YrBlT, 1-15-13;

Previous Sale: \$232,000, 09-08-00

Lamorinda Weekly

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After Tough Winter, Good Buzz So Far

...continued from page D1

A colony can collapse if there's significant infestation. Options for dealing with mites run the gamut from doing nothing and hope the hive has strong genetics, to using an organic mite-away strip and beyond.

Vigo had been making his Bee Rancher rounds that day to one of the over 70 hives he manages, noting that the last hive he visited in Lafayette was "really cranking," describing the bees as very happy, in the sun all day, out of the wind, located on a hill, with lots of available pollen.

Next stop for Vigo was a Moraga hive with unusual origins. Wild bees created a hive in one of the large wooden columns that flanked the front door – rather like a vertical, stinging non-wel-

come mat. The homeowners wisely asked for help; the very large column was removed in sections and eventually the bees ended up in a bee box in their back yard. They seem to be thriving – Vigo carefully transferred their original waxy combs into frames that are now safely away from the front door.

Bees hanging out on your car, or in your chimney? Swarm season is right around the corner, typically starting in mid-March and running through mid-June. It's a natural phenomenon that occurs when the colony senses that there is no more room for the existing amount of bees. The colony will then produce a sister queen, and, just before she hatches, the existing queen will leave the hive with about half the colony in search of a new



home; this is how honey bees propagate.

"We try to manage the swarming process by splitting the hive into two colonies when we see a queen cup that has been formed and adding an additional hive box to the existing colony to give them more room," said Vigo.

Fear not, though a swarm of bees can be frightening, they are actually at their most docile state because

they don't have a home to defend and they have gorged themselves on honey. One might find a swarm of bees on a fence post, the bumper of a car, in a bush or on the branch of a tree; they will stay there until they find a new home.

Despite a tough winter, Vigo's business continues to prosper. He's currently taking orders for spring hives; for more information check the website at www.thebeeranchers.com or call (925) 519-0560.



Bee swarm removal

Photo provided

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Tom Barber, Lafayette, CA - 2012

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Lance Swanson, Lafayette, CA - 2012
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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Branching Out

By Cynthia Brian

“A liquid moon moves gently among the long branches. Thus having prepared their buds against a sure winter, the wise trees stand sleeping in the cold.” William Carlos Williams



An old fence gets a colorful make-over with Hardenbergia violaceae, the purple lilac vine



The coral colored twigs of the red branch Japanese maple add sparkle to the blue sky.

I was wrong! Oh, so wrong! And how thrilled I am that I was. One would think that history would be the precedent, but as in stock warnings, past performance is not an indicator of the future. After decades of dismal, dreary, drab Februarys, Mother Nature decided to march on with an early spring in the second month of this new year! Only a few wet weather days tarnished the mostly sunny daylight hours, frosty mornings, and very cold nights. It has been a cheery month, not dreary in the least.

By mid February, my daffodils, crocus, flowering pears and flowering peaches were in full bloom. The birds were singing, the bees were buzzing, and I was dancing in the dirt. Because of the gorgeous weather, much needed hardscape repairs were accomplished chez moi. This year while I was outside benefiting

from the sun's rays, I took the time to really study the beautiful structure of trees in their dormant splendor, something that rarely occurs with inclement weather.

In winter months, unless we are in the Sierras admiring the snow-clad conifers, most of us tend not to take a good look at our leafless trees. We enjoy the beautiful spring flowers and the fabulous fall foliage, without ever paying attention to the bare bark. Although as children we normally color branches with



The mottled trunk of a Japanese maple is beautiful any time of year. Photos Cynthia Brian

a brown crayon, most trees are every color but brown, exhibiting a variety of shades including maroon, gray, yellow, orange, and white. For example, my striking Japanese maple “Sango Kabu” has striking coral red branches that glitter in the sunlight.

The outer bark is the tree's protection from the elements. Tree bark can be smooth, textured, velvety, prickly, patchy, peeling, dull, or bright. On a clear blue-sky day, bark shimmers and shines, and when situated against a backdrop of evergreens, the trunks are a visual treat. Of course, evergreen specimens are of interest as well, such as the heavily textured slivers of redwood.

...continued one page D10

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Tulip Magnolia	Pistache
Palm	
Golden Chain	
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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

...continued from page D8

If a tree is pruned, the style in which it is pruned becomes another ornamentation. One of the most fascinating styles is pollarding, an age-old pruning technique supposedly originated in Holland, adding drama and beauty to winter stems. It was used to harvest firewood for heating and saplings for wooden shoes without killing the tree. Today it is utilized mostly on city trees to contain size but when done consistently, the tree becomes an art piece. With pollarding, a gardener cuts back the main limbs of the tree. In the spring, new shoots grow below the cuts and are then removed. After a few of these heavy cuttings, gnarly stubs form at the top of the tree. A pollarded tree must continue to be pollarded every year to two years otherwise it risks developing weak shoots that push against one another allowing moisture to enter the wood which eventually rots and kills the tree. Some trees that are commonly pollarded include locust, linden, willow, redbud, mulberry, beech, horsechestnut, and poplars. A great place to enjoy pollarded trees is in the band concourse between the Academy of Arts and Sciences and the de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. They eerily remind one of a haunted forest where the trees awaken, talk, and follow the traveler.

Before all the leaves spring forth in your home forest, take a walk outside with



The knots and gnarls of a pollarded tree is reminiscent of a haunted forest.



Who can resist the shimmering clusters of brilliant blooms of the Golden Chain tree?

Photos Cynthia Brian

your camera to snap the anatomy of a bare tree. Look for interesting pruning techniques as you drive the suburban roads, and savor the fragrance of the fruit trees in blossom.

Branch out!

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for March

"If a bud burst into bloom every time I thought of you, all the earth would be a glorious garden." Catherine Atkinson

Fruit tree buds are swollen this month and are especially handsome as the buds open to flower and the leaves slowly unfurl. Growth is evident daily and it's especially rewarding to cut a branch for indoor gazing. Try a flowering peach, pear, or cherry for a long lasting experiment in watching nature come alive. With the month of March heralding in the "real" spring, now is the time to check our brown thumbs at the garden gate and dive in with the green.

- **IMPROVE** your homes value by adding trees to the landscape. It is estimated that landscaping along with mature trees can add anywhere from 10 to 20 percent to your home's property value.
- **PLANT** early blooming pollinators including California poppy, chives, larkspur dianthus, lupine, pea, viola, and sweet alyssum.
- **EAT** broccoli. Broccoli is one of the world's most nutritious vegetables. It energizes us with vitamins C, K, and A as well as folate, manganese, potassium and magnesium. It is high in fiber and protein as well as flavonoids that reduce inflammation, and phytonutrients that help the body detoxify. It could be the most multi-tasking vegetable ever.
- **SOAK** the seeds of bean sprouts each Sunday and you'll have a fresh week's worth of sprouts by Friday.
- **GO** au natural. Spend time outdoors in natural settings. Being in touch with nature is essential to good health of mind, body, and spirit.
- **ELIMINATE** pesticides from your gardening tool kit. They are detrimental to beneficial insects and humans.
- **START** seeds inside now for transplanting next month to your garden space.
- **INCREASE** visual and nutritional interest by planning to plant vegetables and herbs in ornamental containers close to your kitchen door. You won't sacrifice flavor and functionality will soar.
- **START** your spring gardening by improving the soil. Gardens are often missing the microorganisms and nutrients needed for a thriving crop.
- **CLUMP** flowers together in areas measuring four feet diameter or more to attract bees, butterflies, and birds.
- **FERTILIZE** fruit trees and flowering shrubs with a high nitrogen solution.
- **DIVIDE** perennials such as daylilies and agapanthas.
- **VISIT** the de Young Museum's exhibit of Bouquet of Arts for an invasion of flowers and masterpieces March 19-23. For tickets, go to <https://tickets.famsf.org>.
- **RE-SEED** or plant a new lawn during this spring weather. Commence weekly mowing for sturdier growing. For best results, do not use a leaf bag but instead allow the clippings to compost on the grass naturally.
- **BRIGHTEN** a weary fence with the purple lilac vine that resembles sweet peas, Hardenbergia violaceae.
- **SPRAY** aphids with a strong blast from the hose. If more attention is needed, fill a spray bottle with dish washing detergent mixed with water to douse the pests.
- **CLEAN** fountains, ponds, birdbaths, and other water features to welcome our flying friends home for the warmer weather.
- **HOWL** at the moon at the vernal equinox on March 20, the real first day of spring when day and night are exactly 12 hours each!
- **SHOOT** photos of your naked trees and more as they begin to don their spring wardrobe.

The buds are bursting into bloom as I think with love of all my two-footed and four-footed friends. Life is a glorious garden.

Happy gardening to you!

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Cynthia Brian
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When you have a tree under a power line that requires frequent reduction by the utility co. it's important to have proper pruning before, or have the tree removed, and plant a tree with the criteria (i.e. size and placement) that should be determined by an arborist, so that a tree's health and appearance will never be compromised by the need for utility pruning. So don't wait until it's too late, call your local ISA Arborist at Advance Tree Service and Landscaping to help you determine your choice for the perfect tree.

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ORINDA



41 La Cresta

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Offered at \$895,000

ORINDA



32 Dos Posos

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ORINDA



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Offered at \$1,939,000

ORINDA



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Offered at \$2,195,000

MORAGA



103 Cypress Point Way

Terrific Moraga Country Club 3Bd/2.5Ba 1749 sq ft light & bright updated townhome. Excellent location close to new clubhouse, pool & golf. Outstanding Moraga Schools.

Offered at \$699,000

MORAGA



3 Peralta Court

Absolutely beautiful single-level hm in Sanders Ranch. Eat-in kit. w/dbl ovens, gas range, built in refr., island w/counter seating & more. Hdwd flrs, spacious beds, & great storage. Lvl yd w/slate patio.

Offered at \$1,089,000

MORAGA



86 Brookfield Drive

Tucked on a desirable cul-de-sac, this updated single story oozes charm w/ indoor/outdoor flow, kit./fam rm combo highlighting Carrera marble island & Fr. drs opening to 1/3 ac of lawn, pool, gazebo, garden.

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LAFAYETTE



1690 Reliez Valley Rd.

Fab 1+ acre ridgeline property with spectacular views of Mt. Diablo etc. Paved driveway to building site with utilities and sewer at property. Includes preliminary plans for 4900+ sq ft home.

Offered at \$650,000

LAFAYETTE



11 Leslyn Lane

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Offered at \$2,650,000

LAFAYETTE



3949 S. Peardale

Gracious Colonial in Happy Valley. All exquisitely remodeled extraordinary appointments, detail. Lafayette Juniors Kitchen Tour 2009. Fab. Kit., Ba., Luxurious Master Suite. Beautiful living areas. Great neighborhood.

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EL CERRITO



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WALNUT CREEK



18 Iron Horse Lane

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Offered at \$329,000

WALNUT CREEK



3706 Waterford Lane

Gorgeous Traditional 4bd/3.5ba Northgate home. Many upgrades! New carpet, paint, refinished hardwood floors. Huge eat-in kitchen/family rm. Formal dining & living rms. Professionally landscaped backyard. Grand master with adjoining den.

Offered at \$1,370,000

WALNUT CREEK



2050 Shell Ridge Trail

Northgate Vineyard Estate w/ Gated 1.08 Acres, Grand main house, gorgeous grounds, guest/party house w/movie theatre, diner style game room + newer salt-water pool, 5-car garage.

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