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Synergies Harnessed: Lamorinda Presents Pushes to Change States of Mind

By Sophie Braccini



Jay Lifson displays a jar waiting to receive fireworks donations at a recent Rotary meeting Photo John Sherry

For the first time, a group of volunteers from Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda are working together across borders for the success of all Lamorinda events and for the pleasure of all residents.

The group calls itself Lamorinda Presents and its first public actions involved raising money for the Moraga fireworks and participating in the Lamorinda Fourth of July Parade in Orinda. The group has also started planning future events that will bring the three communities together.

The movement started in Orinda two years ago after Chris Laszcz-Davis joined the Orinda Association. "I've worked in business internationally for many years, and I've never understood people not working together," she says. "What I found working with the OA was an incredible group of people, not only within the OA but in all the communities in terms of skills and resources."

Lamorinda Presents was established six months ago, bringing together Laszcz-Davis, John Fazel of the Orinda Roadrunners, and Jay Lifson, executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. They had so much fun that they decided to invite Moraga's Edy Schwartz to participate. Others from the three cities have since joined the group, including city staff, members of social groups, and business people.

"We want to support the three communities, and collaborate on initiatives of common community interest, events, celebration and value," says Laszcz-Davis. Members of the group decided to support, both financially and with a physical presence, existing traditional events in Orinda and Moraga. According to Laszcz-Davis, the OA is raising money

during the Orinda parade that will be split this year to support both the parade and the Moraga fireworks. "This is super nice of them," says Moraga Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram who also attends meetings. "The Moraga Chamber also gave the three cities Mason jars to collect money at different businesses for the fireworks." (See the related story at <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0708/Fireworks-Could-Fizzle-Lacking-Funds.html>.)

For the first time the Moraga Chamber and Moraga Citizens Network will be part of the Orinda parade along with some Lafayette businesses, and Lifson is one of the judges in the float competition. A lot of behind the scenes work is also being done by people from all three communities.

Lamorinda Presents is working with Tiraporn Olsen of Lamorinda Web to develop a Lamorinda calendar to avoid important events taking place at the same time, and to raise a larger awareness of what is going on in the three cities. "What will be the net effect for all these events?" asks Olsen. "All the events need to be presented side by side so people will have a choice."

"At the Art and Wine Festival in Lafayette we will have signs that say 'Don't Miss the Orinda Car Show' [which is happening at the same time]," says Lifson. And a sign promoting the festival will be at the car show. "As Tom Stack from Town Hall Theatre's board said, people will go out more if you give them a choice."

Organizing new common events will help to avoid ruffling any local feathers. One of the first ideas was to hold a celebration for the opening of the fourth bore of the Caldecott Tunnel.

The group reached out to Caltrans, the three town managers and council members got involved, but the politics and timing with Caltrans is still unclear, so the celebration will have to wait a while. "But we decided to organize a Lamorinda-wide family outdoor picnic as our first tri-community event," says Laszcz-Davis. The group sees this as something similar to the Iowa Picnic in Long Beach, an all-inclusive event that builds community.

Lifson and Ingram are leading the effort to offer this event at the Moraga Commons Park, starting at 4 p.m. Thursday August 15, just before the Zebop Latin rock concert. "We will have old-fashion park games for all ages. Just an excuse for the three communities to have a relaxing time together," says Ingram.

The scope of Lamorinda Presents is not yet defined; it could encompass tri-community endeavors or fundraising events. "We have no logo, no mission statement," says Laszcz-Davis. "We are a diverse talent pool who meet once a month, discuss projects and just go and do it."

Mark your calendar for the first Lamorinda Picnic Thursday, Aug. 15 and be on the lookout for more

information in the months to come about the celebration for the opening of the Caldecott Tunnel's fourth bore.

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