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Information Age Emergency Monitoring

By Cathy Dausman

Orinda and Lafayette police blotters continue to be unavailable while the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department re-structures its distribution. But that doesn't mean Lamorindans need to go without hearing about the latest emergency responses. In fact, the public can access real-time events through a variety of websites and apps, including Nixle, Pulse Point and a county-wide Community Warning System.

Moraga and Lafayette currently use Nixle (www.nixle.com) to communicate with the public. Founded in 2007, the Nixle website says its company offers "both free and paid notification services for local police departments, county emergency management offices, municipal governments and their agencies." Child abductions, a BART station fire, gas and water main leaks, weather warnings and event notifications which

may affect traffic patterns all go out over Nixle. Subscribers learned about Lafayette's recent downed power lines; they also were notified about Lafayette school lockdowns immediately following a local bank robbery in real time. Moraga posted Nixle warnings after a stolen car and subsequent hit and run investigation became an area wide manhunt. Nixle also broadcasts Amber Alerts. Users can even assist the agencies involved by responding with "reply to" on the site.

Pulse Point (pulsepoint.org) is a smartphone app designed by a San Ramon Valley fire fighter, said Dennis Rein, Lamorinda's emergency preparedness coordinator. The program was originally developed to enlist help from those with CPR training in nearby medical emergencies. When such an emergency shows on the Pulse Point screen, it pinpoints the

user location, the location of the medical emergency and where the nearest life-saving automated external defibrillator can be found. Traffic collisions, medical emergencies, fire alarms, technical rescues and other emergency response events are detailed, right down to the emergency engines responding. There is also an option to monitor dispatch communications as they are made on your smart phone - making the app a modern day police scanner. A variety of agencies subscribe to Pulse Point nationwide. Local agencies making use of the Pulse Point technology include Moraga-Orinda Fire District, Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Ramon Fire departments.

According to its website, the Community Warning System (www.cococws.us/getCurrentAlerts.action) "alerts people in Contra Costa County to imminent threats to their

life and safety." Depending on the emergency and affected area, notification may be sent via sirens, phone alerts, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration alerts or Emergency Alert System notifications broadcast over commercial radio stations. CWS also employs a variety of

social media platforms, including text and email alerts, Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Nixle, Pulse Point and Community Warning System are quick and easy opt-in subscriptions. Instant gratification for those of us living in the Information Age.

Civic News Lafayette

Breaking Bread with a Bread Maker



Photo Andy Schreck

Addressing assembled city leaders and business people at the annual Chamber of Commerce sponsored Thanksgiving breakfast, keynote speaker Tom Franier, co-owner of Semifreddi's, passionately explained why he's so grateful. The successful business he started with two partners had humble beginnings in a tiny bakery in Kensington, near Berkeley, with one sourdough

recipe, a grand total of four products and a vision to bake the best bread every day. Diablo Foods was their bakery's first customer in Contra Costa County almost 30 years ago. Moraga resident Franier shared his philosophy - to simply take care of his employees, who will consistently craft a fine product that customers love. With the highest wages in the industry, health insurance, a 401K

plan and a generous profit sharing arrangement, he credits motivated employees with the success of the business. Clearly the proof is in the sourdough; the business now grosses more than \$15 million annually. On average, Semifreddi's delivers close to 200,000 loaves of bread per week and roughly 40,000 pastries and cookies throughout the Bay Area. *C. Tyson*

Civic News Moraga

New Plan for Rancho Laguna II

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Summerhill's proposed new plan includes several changes, none of which is significant enough to lead to a challenge of the approved Conceptual Development Plan, notably the re-siting of two lots that were going to be set on a ridgeline, and that required significant grading, which have been relocated to the lower housing cluster along Rheem Blvd. The new plan also reduces grading by moving inside streets, it preserves a mature buckeye tree along Rheem Boulevard, suppresses some mitigation wetlands that were, according to Preserve Lamorinda Open Space, proposed in a poor location, and adds

a detention basin for the drainage of the upper development cluster.

In a letter to the town's planning director, Suzanne Jones of Preserve Lamorinda Open Space stated: "SummerHill Homes has been a very willing and cooperative partner in working with (Preserve Lamorinda Open Space) and we greatly appreciate their efforts. The changes they have made represent an honest attempt to work with the community and address project impacts within the constraints imposed by the (Conceptual Development Plan) and the requirement of the new detention basin. We ask that the changes outlined in

this letter be met with the Town's approval." Jones added that although Preserve Lamorinda Open Space supports the changes proposed by Summerhill, the group still thinks that the plan includes too many homes.

"The alternative plan has less environmental impact and the area graded is smaller," said Shawna Brekke-Read, planning director, "so we recommended the Planning Commission proceed with the alternative plan." Once the commission completes its review, the next step will be the presentation of the General Development Plan by Summerhill Homes during a series of public meetings in 2014.

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