

## Community Service

We are pleased to make space available whenever possible for some of Lamorinda's dedicated community service organizations to submit news and information about their activities. Submissions can be sent to [storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com) with the subject header In Service to the Community.

### New Troop 219 Eagle Scouts Honored

Submitted by Lisa Lindgren



Back row, from left: Elias Morley, Austin Wentzel, David MacDannald, and Ethan Lindgren. Front row: Anton Reifsteck, Layton Wiczynski, Vincent Gladden, and Justin Higgins.

Photo Jamie Westdal

Boy Scout Troop 219 honored eight new Eagle Scouts Dec. 14 at St. Perpetua Catholic Parish in Lafayette. For their Eagle Scout projects, Anton Reifsteck of Acalanes High School led a group of scouts at the Lafayette Reservoir to build a retaining wall in the upper parking lot, Austin Wentzel led a group of Scouts in building two picnic benches for the high school, Ethan Lindgren designed and constructed raised garden beds at The Gardens at Heather Farm, Walnut Creek, and Vincent Gladden completely refurbished the sign at Happy Valley Elementary School as well as the landscaping around the area of the sign. The four Scouts attend Acalanes High School. Layton Wiczynski of Campolindo High School led a group of scouts building Wood Duck boxes

that were put into the ground at the San Leandro Reservoir. Justin Higgins of Bentley High School installed 10 Wood Duck nesting boxes around the Lafayette Reservoir perimeter, including routine inspection for monitoring usage and hatch, and 10 additional Wood Duck nesting boxes at the San Leandro Reservoir—he earned the Hornaday Award for this project—and Elias Morley, also a Bentley student, led a group of Scouts removing an invasive species of plants from Leona Regional Open Space. David MacDannald of Holden High School and Fusion Academy designed and built a new retaining wall to replace a 72-foot-long wooden retaining wall in the parking lot of Lafayette United Methodist Church.

### Saklan Kindergartners Learn the 'Art' of Giving at Special Event

Submitted by Erin Cooley



Saklan School kindergarten teacher Amy Burnett smiles with student Ryan Lo in front of art-work at a recent auction. Photo provided

Part of kindergarten teacher Amy Burnett's teaching philosophy at The Saklan School in Moraga centers around making art a major component in her lesson plan. She does this because she believes art is a great equalizer, and no matter what a child's skill may be academically, they can always express themselves through art.

Six years ago, when Burnett was evaluating her curriculum, she added a level of social consciousness to it. A parent at Saklan introduced Burnett to the Nicholas Colby Fund ([nicholascolbyfund.org](http://nicholascolbyfund.org)), which helps children with cancer by filling backpacks with books, toys, and games to keep them entertained during their hospital stays. She decided to have her kindergartners make original art pieces, and put on an auction Dec. 12 and 13 to benefit the fund. Burnett then takes the children on a field trip to a local toy store, and using proceeds from the art show, students pick out the toys and games to fill the backpacks for the sick children.

The first year that she did this, she was stunned by the grace and compassion the chil-

dren showed. These little 5- and 6-year-olds were in a toy store, during the holidays, and not one of them was looking for anything for themselves, said Saklan parent Erin Cooley. "They were pure in their thoughts like, 'What would make me smile if I were sick?' and 'What can I choose to make someone feel better?'" she said. "The parents that witnessed this the first year were smiling from ear to ear. And, each year since, it has been even more overwhelming."

There have been years where people make extra donations, beyond purchasing the art, just so the children can give more to the fund, and there have even been other children in the school who purchase art from the show with their own allowance money, Cooley said. "In a word, it's magical."

Burnett says that "children are never too young to make a difference."

"When we are mindful, we pay attention," Burnett told her students. "When we are mindful, it is quite simple to be grateful. How lucky are we all to be a part of this event; to be part of this simple lesson of compassion and joy?"

### Volunteers with a Higher Calling

By Cathy Dausman



David Yoon and Bill Gurnett

Photo Cathy Dausman

While Bill Gurnett and David Yoon are volunteers who serve the state Office of Emergency Services under the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office, some might say these men also answer to a higher power.

Gurnett and Yoon—Pastor Bill and Pastor David, respectively—are both ordained ministers. In addition to their "day jobs" they serve as law enforcement chaplains. Unlike a community chaplain, law enforcement chaplains are ordained, and their conversations are held in confidence.

According to its website, Contra Costa County currently has 25 law enforcement chaplains supporting police, fire and civic organizations throughout the area. In addition to his work as pastor for Landmark Missionary Baptist Church in Martinez, Gurnett volunteers 30 to 40 hours a month assisting the Lafayette Police Department. He has been there for six of his eight years as a volunteer chaplain, and is one of three lead chaplains organized under a senior chaplain. Yoon is associate pastor for Concord Korean Baptist Church in Martinez. He was sworn in as a chaplain for the Sheriff's office in October, 2012, and has been allied with the Orinda Police Department since January, 2013.

The two ride along with on-duty officers, so they see suicides, traffic fatalities, shootings and accidental death; they accompany police on death notification calls. They feel their presence lends a calming effect to the situation.

Law enforcement chaplains offer comfort to victims and their families, facilitate end of life planning, and, as Yoon said, generally "act as a sounding board" to those involved. Although there are exceptions, volunteer chaplains don't usually work inside county jails because the jails employ paid chaplains. "We bring reality together" and help victims "move forward in a healthy way," said Yoon.

Gurnett emphasized that although they are

chaplains, their job is not to convert, but to help "normal people in abnormal times."

"We are with the families until they get a support system," he said. Law enforcement chaplains help both victims and first responders alike. A chaplain is often called upon to conduct an event debriefing, called a critical incident management debriefing. This process helps those affected by a traumatic event cope with its aftermath. Gurnett and other law enforcement chaplains were involved in several briefing sessions after two window washers were shocked and burned in Orinda in 2010.

Among those in attendance were then Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Randy Bradley and then Orinda Police Chief Jeffrey Jennings. Moraga Police Department requested law enforcement chaplain assistance after a particularly difficult vehicle fatality several years ago.

"People don't realize what police and fire [responders] go through," Gurnett said. Yoon admires first responder professionalism and wants to do more for them. "I wish I could spend more time seeing what they do," he said.

Orinda Police Chief Scott Haggard calls the law enforcement volunteer chaplain program "a great organization, very professional, and always available to help."

Asked if their work is more difficult at holiday time, Gurnett and Yoon both said no, although Yoon said it's no surprise that bad things happen. Gurnett said it is their system of beliefs and their training which helps resolve events and puts things into perspective.

"We know how quickly life can end," Gurnett said simply.

To learn more about Contra Costa County's Law Enforcement Chaplain program, contact the county's Volunteer Services Coordinator at (925) 646-4461, or visit <http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=266>.

### Together in Training

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Duncan Siebert, Lamorinda CERT, confers with Cheryl Teixeira of the Moraga Police Department during an EOC drill at Saint Mary's College.

Photo Dennis Rein

Moraga-Orinda Fire District fire chief Stephen Healy thought the training was "a great example of local partnerships that benefit the community."

"Sharing resources will be key in a major event," he said.

"Basically, strangers from three cities that normally don't work together had to pool their talents and make the simulation work," added MOFD battalion chief Darrell Lee. Lee credits the idea of combining Lamorinda cities for emergency preparedness to former MOFD chief Randy Bradley.

Participant Steve Ehrhardt, Orinda facilities and parks supervisor, said he was "eager to learn, in a practical way, what the functions of an EOC are and what we as representatives

of the community can do better to prepare ourselves in the event of a full-scale emergency situation." Training manager Scott Brown saw "passion and the desire to learn" throughout the Lamorinda session. He noted the importance of "full involvement from top to the bottom in the jurisdictions involved."

"Citizens must trust their government is prepared for the next emergency," he explained. "Your emergency responders have vowed to run towards the problem, not away from it. They are training to be ready. They know what they are doing," he said.

Although it took nearly a year to organize this EOC training, Rein already hopes to do it again. He summarized the results in a single word: "Awesome!"