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Town Tribute to George and Julie Fisher

The Fishers leaving Moraga is like the Founding Fathers leaving America

By Sophie Braccini



Julie and George Fisher outside their Moraga home. Photo Sophie Braccini

More than 200 people attended a banquet in George and Julie Fisher's honor at Saint Mary's College on Jan. 13. Many of the diners were members of the Moraga Movers who were joined by out of town friends, city officials, and younger people who wanted to hear about a page of the history of their town that was about to be turned.

The Moragans of today may be unaware of how much this couple, named Citizens of the Year in 2006, and the generations of those who moved to Moraga in the '60s and '70s, shaped the town we live in today.

"When we moved to Moraga in 1966 there were 9,000 people living here," recalled George Fisher. "We bought a lot on Camino Ricardo, where developers were building a whole new neighborhood." Julie Fisher remembers looking at the model home, but then asking for a fifth bedroom, a larger family room, before the young family of five moved in the secluded house they thought they would never leave. "But when our third

daughter moved to Florida where her two siblings already live, we decided it was time for us to join our family," she said.

"The '60s and '70s were a time when the wives of young professional men stayed home and raised their children," explained Julie Fisher, who earned a degree in psychology from the east coast school where she met George. "Most of us were college educated, so we had to find things to do to keep stimulated." They engaged in 'community-making' through various groups such as the Moraga New-Comers, the Women's Society, Moraga Juniors and the Moraga Service League in which she was very active. "There were no parks, no trails, no nothing," said Julie Fisher. "All there was in this town were two shopping centers."

After the incorporation in 1974, the Fishers continued to stay engaged. The first Parks and Recreation Director hired was Orinda resident William Penn Mott, Jr. who had directed both the California and the national park services under Ronald Reagan and supported the creation of Oakland's Children's Fairyland that was allegedly Walt Disney's inspiration for his own parks. "He (Mott) was incredibly imaginative," remembers George Fisher. "He wanted to install a wave-pool in the Rheem Theatre and organize grass-skiing at the Commons."

The Fishers both served on the Parks and Recreation Commission at different times and were tapped for the boards of service organizations such as the Moraga Park Foundation, which puts on the summer concert series every year.

But their interests ranged further than recreation.

"Our friend's husband got into a serious accident in '75 and was saved by a nurse who lived nearby," said Julie Fisher. "It took 25 minutes to get an ambulance and another 25 to take him to Alta Bates. Some of us started to realize that we needed local paramedic services, including an ambulance." She was at the forefront of the fundraising effort with the Service League that purchased the first van-turned-paramedic transport. "We canvassed the whole town and raised the initial \$10,000," she recalled. Then Rescue One Foundation was incorporated in 1977 to ensure the ongoing funding of the paramedic services of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

"I had never heard of such a foundation as Rescue One before I came to work for MOFD," said fire chief Stephen Healy during the farewell dinner. "In many places it is a struggle to maintain paramedic services. My hat's off to you Julie, the Fisher family, and members of the community for having the vision and continuing to serve (on the foundation board) for 37 years."

When they reached retirement age, the Fishers turned their eyes to the recreation activities offered to Moraga's seniors. "I remember when we went to the board meetings of the group that was then called the Hacienda Seniors," said George. "It felt like all we talked about was how long it could stay in business." It seemed to him that the group was struggling, with a dwindling membership and events that didn't attract many of its 200 members. In 2007, the Fishers took on the challenge of rejuvenating the group and met with Penelope Leach, then parks and recreation director, as well as a few others interested in the group that George Fisher calls a passion of his life. "And it was Julie who proposed the new name Moraga Movers," he said. He penned the Moraga Movers' bulletin for years and served as the group's president.

The Moraga Movers also became a voice in the town and George Fisher fought hard to cancel plans to move town staff into the Hacienda that was so dear to the heart of many in the community. That pugnacity was noted by Moraga's town manager, Jill Keimach, who said that when she first arrive in

town she soon realized that the Fishers were not only a warm and loving couple, but also people with determination when it came to making Moraga a better place.

Today the Moraga Movers number close to 500 members, the meetings and dinners are very well attended with interesting speakers and topics.

The Fishers are putting their house on the market and are expecting to move by April 1. You might still catch them at Safeway before they leave. They also plan to come back every summer, renting something in the neighborhood "and enjoying those wonderful cool Moraga evening concerts at the Commons," concludes George Fisher.

Lamorinda Weekly received the following message in an email from the Fishers after the event:

"And what a great party it was! We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to our friends and guests who attended the monthly dinner of the Moraga Movers at the Soda Center on Jan. 13. It was a wonderful experience for us both. We would especially like to thank Linda Borrelli for her conception and planning of the event and John Haffner for his superb MC skills.

The remarks made by various speakers for the Town, Rescue 1, the Fire District, the Lamorinda Village, and the Moraga Movers were greatly appreciated. And then the remarks made by long time friends were funny, nostalgic, and only a little bit scandalous. We thank you all."

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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