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## A Wise Neighborhood

By Nick Marnell



Lamorinda Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein presents the FireWise Community Recognition award to Sleepy Hollow neighborhood representative Deb Stephenson May 8. Looking on, from left: MOFD's Kathy Leonard, fire marshal, and Stephen Healy, fire chief; Cal Fire division chief David Shew; and state fire marshal Tonya Hoover. Photo Ohlen Alexander

program is a nationwide initiative that recognizes communities for taking action to protect people and properties from the risk of fire in wildland and urban areas.

Deb Stephenson, the Sleepy Hollow FireWise Community representative, said that there is still much more to be done.

"I remember the Oakland Hills fire," she said. "And my kids went to the Sleepy Hollow school. We need to build awareness of what individuals can do, and I will continue to get the word out to help bring our properties up to speed."

For information on how your neighborhood can qualify as a FireWise community, contact Lamorinda Emergency Preparedness Director Dennis Rein at (925) 698-4575 or drein@mofd.org.

Charles Green attended a briefing in 2011 held by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, which urged citizens to take responsibility to protect their property so that it will not burn.

"There was a denial, or a disregard, of a potential threat to our area," said Green of the Orinda community. So he organized his Sleepy Hollow neighbors to conduct a wildfire hazard assessment of their properties and develop a plan to address safety concerns.

The group attended training classes in Sacramento and at Saint Mary's College and completed evaluations of 80 yards and areas surrounding Sleepy Hollow homes. "Things we pointed out cost very little money," said Green.

The first community project was finished in 2012. "Five of us worked on our yards. We raised the height of low limbs on oak trees and we got rid of dead pine trees," said Green. Brush was cleared and highly flammable plants were removed along sides of roads. The following year, the community realigned and renovated the emergency evacuation path behind Sleepy Hollow Elementary School.

Sleepy Hollow recently became the first neighborhood in Contra Costa County to be recognized by FireWise Communities/USA, a project of the National Fire Prevention Agency. The

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