

Local Aviatrix and Author Discusses Life in the Sky

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Early on women weren't chosen for the astronaut program so Marggraff trained to be a pilot, commercial pilot and an instructor. "I persevered and carved my place in the sky even though feeling out of place most of the time in the mainly male world of aviation. I was tested in more ways than just by flying exams," she says with a wry smile.

When she began this adventure some of her acquaintances thought she was crazy or maybe had a mid-life death wish but her group of close friends, the "Chicks in Charge" encouraged her and also began their own search for more stimulating lives. "I treasure their friendship and their attitude. "We never said 'That's too hard, or too dangerous, you can't do it,'" Marggraff remarks.

The next big step was to train at the NASTAR Center outside of Philadelphia in the Phoenix Centrifuge where one can "fly" to 16,000 feet at a perceived speed of 25,000 miles per hour seated in a gondola at the end of a 25-foot arm. Marggraff says, as she took up to 6Gs momentarily, "Your face can look 10 to 20 years older as it strains against the G forces. There's heavy pressure and we're told we should push our breath and squeeze our muscles. Another mother in the class quipped, 'We shouldn't have any trouble, it sounds just like child birth.'"

Author of "100 Things to Make a Difference," Marggraff has completed



MJ Marggraff at a recent Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary meeting. Photo provided a second book, "Time for a Lift" due to be released in December. It's based on true events when she reconnected with her dream of learning to fly at a time her family included children, 8 and 10, and she was in her 40s. While she doesn't expect all her readers will take up flying, the message is "finding your passion in life is a necessity."

"It's not without hard work and humility, but there will be a personal transformation that will be yours forever," she explains.

A volunteer at the Space Station Museum in Novato, this trim, blonde woman with a ready smile transmits her enthusiasm for space to young students and the importance of STEM, (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) to prepare them for all the challenges new technology brings.

"The museum inspires all with its

real and touchable space artifacts, space suits, and parts of spacecrafts. I do hands-on experiments related to astronomy such as how eclipses work and what makes a prism. Others there include former NASA employees and local astronauts who drop in to visit. I think I'm the only aviatrix and, not surprisingly, I encourage learning to fly, especially to girls. Only 8 percent of pilots are women."

Space Fest, which includes lots of booths and rides in a lunar rover, will be held Aug. 2 at the museum. The Space Station Museum is located in Pacheco Plaza, 464 Ignacio Blvd. in Novato. The hours are Thursdays and Fridays: 11 am to 3 pm.; Saturdays and Sundays: noon to 4 p.m. For information about a presentation on "The Edge" to your group, email Marggraff at mjmarggraff@gmail.com.

diablo ballet

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in conjunction with the Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Lamorinda Weekly and the Lafayette Community Foundation

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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 with the subject header In Service to the Community.

Lafayette Juniors Raise Nearly \$50,000 for Charity

Submitted by Christy Mack



From left: Melanie Brinkman, Laura Lashinsky, Candy Calhoun, Amy Friedli, Whitney Firestone, and Jenny Shepherd
Photo provided

The Lafayette Juniors raised nearly \$50,000 in the past 12 months for local non-profit organizations. The funds were distributed by the Juniors June 5 in a special ceremony at the Lafayette Community Center to First Place for Youth, STAND!, the Lafayette Library, the Special Education Enrichment and Development Foundation of Lafayette (SEED), and Twin Canyon Camp. "We would like to thank everyone who supported us throughout the year," said Tina Sebree, Lafayette Juniors president. "Their exceptional generosity enabled our beneficiaries to expand the services they provide to children and families in our local communities."

The Lafayette Juniors have a history of organizing fundraising

events like the Rummage Sale in the fall and Kitchen Tour in the spring for the sole purpose of raising money for selected beneficiaries. This year the Juniors chose First Place for Youth as their major beneficiary and donated \$25,000 to support its work with foster youth 16 to 24 years old who are close to aging out of the foster care system or have recently aged out of care.

"The Lafayette Juniors are a remarkable group of women with the magic combination of compassion and action. Their donation of \$25,000 will be used to give foster kids support right when they are learning to support themselves, including helping them get their first apartment, their first job and continue on with school," explained Valerie Todd,

director of major gifts for First Place for Youth. The Lafayette Juniors also donated \$10,000 to STAND!, \$5,000 each to SEED and the Lafayette Library, and \$4,000 to Twin Canyon Camp.

The Juniors are looking forward to continuing this tradition of giving and are now accepting applications from all non-profits in Contra Costa and neighboring counties in the San Francisco Bay Area who serve children, families and seniors. They will select 4 to 5 organizations from the applicant pool to become their 2014-15 beneficiaries. Fundraising for these groups will begin this fall. To obtain an application or learn more about the Lafayette Juniors please visit www.lafayettejuniors.org.

Preschoolers Donate Blankets to Project Linus

Submitted by Jennifer Gerst



Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church Nurtury Preschool students show off one of two blankets made for Project Linus.
Photo provided

It's never too young for children to start doing service projects to help others in need – at least that's the philosophy at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church Nurtury Preschool. While searching for a hands-on project her class of 3-year-olds could do, a Nurtury teacher came across Project Linus. This organization solicits handmade blankets to be given to children in crisis – in hospitals, shelters, or in the care of

social service agencies. Miss Jennifer's class decorated hearts that were appliquéd to fleece fabric, and (with some adult help) tied the fringe around the edges to create two cozy blankets to donate to Project Linus. The children were excited to know that their hard work will comfort a child in need. For more information on MVPCC Nurtury Preschool, call (925) 376-4800 or visit www.MVPCtoday.org.

Congo Swim Kicks Off

Some local residents walk Lafayette Reservoir to help

Submitted by Bobbie Dodson



Cora Kalukuta from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Suzanna Creasy, an eighth-grade graduate of Seven Hills School in Orinda, launched Congo Swim at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church on Father's Day.

Photo provided

The third annual Congo Swim is now accepting registrations. "Most people in our Lamorinda community are not aware of the humanitarian crisis in Congo," states Keris Dahlkamp, Congo Swim founder, who has swum the length of Lake Tahoe twice for this event.

"Our hope is to break the silence about this issue. It is estimated that at least 6 million people have died from war-related causes since 1996, half being children under the age of 5. Also, hundreds of thousands of

women and children in eastern Congo have endured sexual violence. Funds raised will be distributed as grants by Global Fund for Women and Friends of the Congo to women and youth-led groups in Congo."

Participants are invited to swim, walk, run, ride, dance or donate. Activities suggested are to: learn to swim as a child or adult; walk around Lafayette Reservoir as many times as you can; ride your bike a certain distance once a week; time some minutes each day, or week while you dance; get your swim team to sponsor a Swimathon; organize a Congo Swim barbecue or party. "Choose a fun activity, involve your family and try to get sponsors so more people will be informed about the dire situation in Congo," Dahlkamp suggests. Donations are also accepted.

A 9-year old participant from last year shared, "I joined because people in Congo are suffering and I am here using an iPad made from valuable minerals that are supposed to benefit them, but don't." For the past 16 years, neighboring countries such as Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi have reaped most of the profits

from mining such valuable minerals as coltran, tin and gold in Congo. Orindan Suzanna Creasey, an eighth grader, recently walked 22 miles around Lafayette Reservoir with her family, to mimic the 22 miles Dahlkamp swam in Lake Tahoe.

Oakland resident Cora Kalukuta says, "As a Congolese woman I'm participating because I desire for women in all of Congo to be empowered to nurture their families, work good jobs, have an education - to go anywhere in their country without being afraid."

The culmination will be on Aug. 23 when Dahlkamp will again be swimming at Lake Tahoe, with others invited to join him there. Closer to home a "Lake Merritt Walk for Congo" will take place. "If it were my wife or child being affected by violence in this way, I hope that those who could do something would do something," he says. "I invite everyone to join me in Congo Swim because we can do something that will make a difference."

To learn more and register go to www.congoswim.org or phone (925) 812-2496.