

Local Fire Officials Mixed on Ads

By Nick Marnell



In a different kind of public-private partnership, Saint Mary's College purchased MOFD's aerial ladder truck to assist the district in handling campus high rise emergency calls. The Spirit of Saint Mary's is quartered at station 41 in Moraga. Photo Ohlen Alexander

Despite forecasts of operating losses for this fiscal year, and only slight improvements for next year, officials of both Lamorinda fire districts say they are skeptical of the viability of a new revenue generating idea unveiled by a fire agency in the Central Valley.

The Stockton City Council approved a plan July 15 for the Stockton Fire Department to begin selling advertising on its fire engines. "We're the first California department to go into this," said fire chief Jeff Piechura. "This is the first step to see how the community accepts the concept."

Public acceptance was the most frequent objection raised by Lamorinda fire officials. Supervisor Candace Andersen, whose district includes Lamorinda, said that it would be critical to be selective about the types of ads and she raised concern about the dignity of the fire agency. "Would we really want to commercialize it as a means for revenue?" she said. "I'd rather create efficiencies in the agency and look for more traditional sources of revenue."

Moraga-Orinda Fire District chief Stephen Healy acknowledged the potential detraction from district branding. "Our uniforms, our patch, our crest and the decals on our engines reflect our identity," he said. "We are a taxpayer funded organization, and we answer only to the taxpayers. By placing advertising on our engines, we would lose our exclusivity as a government agency and send mixed messages."

"If it is used right, it could fund a special program or a project for the department," said Jeff Carman, fire chief of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. "I would say, if the

message is fitting, and there is revenue to offset the hassle of putting ads on your apparatus, I'd be interested."

The hassle of implementing the Stockton program will be absorbed by Public Service Advertising of Phoenix, Ariz. "We cover everyone," said CEO Chad Dragos. "We are a third party who can do it all, giving the district a buffer, and promoting a fair process for everyone." The most frequent objections that he deals with are the buy-in from the municipality, the integrity of the system - are we endorsing one company over another? - and negative push back from firefighters. "We don't want stickers on our fire trucks!" is the initial reaction from the rank and file, he said. Piechura agreed that he will not infringe on the integrity of his fire service.

Dragos estimated Stockton fire engine ad revenue of more than \$10,000 annually per vehicle. And Piechura said he hoped to merge all 16 of the department vehicles into the program.

Prediction is difficult, observed scientist Niels Bohr, especially about the future. Whether this radical program instituted by the Stockton Fire Department takes hold throughout the industry will be closely followed.



Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings

Next meetings:

Next meeting: Wednesday, Aug. 6
check website for updates

(Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

Civic News Moraga

Setting the Agenda

Mayor wants to discuss bulletproof protection

By Sophie Braccini

With the inclusion of new council chambers in the retrofit of the town's building at 331 Rheem Blvd., Moraga mayor Ken Chew recently asked that the Town Council discuss the idea of installing bulletproof protection for the council dais. The mayor got little traction on the topic, but the idea prompted council members to question whether one of them should be allowed to propose a discussion item for their agenda if it's a subject that the majority of members are not interested in talking about.

"We are constructing this new council chamber," said Chew, "and I have been hearing a lot about a common practice in many cities - putting a metal shield in front of the dais for bulletproofing purposes. I'd like to see if there would be something in-

expensive we could look at."

Councilmember Mike Metcalf indicated that this idea had been brought up about a year ago, although the mayor had no such recollection, and there had been no interest at the time. Councilmember Philip Arth indicated that he didn't feel threatened by the public. "Even if we do not always see eye-to-eye I don't think it ever rises to a level of being life threatening," he said.

Chew said later that he was not feeling threatened, either, but it would be timely to study the topic while the space is being remodeled. "I want to make sure that no one will be hurt in the future," he said.

With a majority of the council clearly against bulletproofing, the town's attorney was ready to dismiss the idea of putting the topic on a fu-

ture agenda. In response to a query from Chew, she said that to her knowledge there was nothing in the town's code that defined whether or not a majority was needed but the Brown Act recommends the approval of the majority.

"Putting an item on the agenda is a privilege of council members," said Councilmember Dave Trotter who, although not interested in considering bulletproof protection himself, added that if a council member felt very strongly about a topic, that member should be able to have it agendized for discussion even if other members are not interested, "as long as this privilege is not abused," he said.

Staff proposed that the agenda for the council's next meeting, Aug. 27, include a discussion about rules for putting items on agendas.

Town News on Nextdoor

By Sophie Braccini

The Town of Moraga recently started posting its bi-weekly newsletter, "About Town," on the social media site Nextdoor.com. Jill Keimach, town manager, said that more than 2000 Moraga residents are currently using Nextdoor. Almost immediately after the town's first post in early July, a concerned resident wondered online why the town was involved in a private neighborhood website.

Moraga town clerk Marty McInturf was quick to respond. "The Town of Moraga does not intend to become involved in the privacy of each neighborhood website and the Town has no ability to access any neighborhood website content," she wrote. "In our agreement with Nextdoor.com, the Town can only provide information, not access or participate in neighborhood communications."

Nextdoor.com spokesperson

Anne Dreshfield confirmed that when public agencies partner with Nextdoor, they are given a Nextdoor account, which allows them to send relevant and timely information to any of the neighborhoods in their jurisdiction that are using Nextdoor, and that these public agencies cannot access any of the content on their neighborhoods' Nextdoor websites - they can only see the comments residents make in response to the agencies' posts. Members also have the ability to mute the agencies' messages.

"Our reason to partner with Nextdoor.com is to provide the Town with another means to communicate information relevant to the community or to a particular individual neighborhood," said McInturf. "We see this as an excellent opportunity to expand our current outreach."

Nextdoor is an online platform organized by neighborhood to which

people post news, requests, items for sale, and start discussions about very local topics, such as a visit from a prowler or a wild animal, or how to get a retaining wall approved. (Read a related article, "Virtually Neighbors," on page D1.)

San Francisco-based Nextdoor was launched in 2011. The site has partnered with 190 city agencies, primarily police departments, across the United States. According to Dreshfield, Nextdoor is currently funded by prominent investors and anticipates that the revenue model will focus on working with local businesses to give them an easy way to connect with the people who live around their businesses.

"About Town" can also be viewed on the town's website, www.moraga.ca.us. Moraga uses Nixle to send out emergency information; to sign up for alerts, go to www.nixle.com.

Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. **email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com**; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:

I am responding to an article that asked for feedback regarding the Moraga Way - Country Club drive story poles. When I first heard that these poles were going to be set up in the dirt lot between the fire station and the real estate company building (the one that has been rebuilt after burning down) I was mildly concerned. Then when I was at a dinner and the Planning Director was the featured speaker, she happened to mention that this was a plan for two-story senior housing. My concerns began increasing. Last week I was walking my dog on Country Club Drive going past the poles and I realized that this plan is a really, really bad idea as it is currently set up. If buildings are erected to the height of the strings, the hills and the trees bordering both streets will be blocked from view, the sky will not be visible from ground level, and both Moraga Way and Country Club Drive will look like alleys instead of roads with Nature as a scenic backdrop. Why do people believe that every flat, open piece of land has to have buildings on it? Why not give landscape designers an opportunity to build a mini-park for the town? Just asking. Thank you!

Caroline Wood
Moraga



A home loan that makes your finances

go farther.

\$3,000*
UP TO
TOWARD CLOSING COSTS

If you're buying a home, or even if you're refinancing a current loan, you deserve a nice housewarming gift to go with it. That's why, for a limited time, SAFE Credit Union is offering lender credits toward closing costs on our Conventional and Jumbo Home Loans—a savings of up to \$3,000 for you! Plus, you get the benefits of historically low rates and local decision making from one of the region's leading lenders. Now there's a welcoming offer.



SAFE
MORTGAGE LENDING
(800) SEE-SAFE ext. 2772
safecu.org/homeloans



NMLS# 466072

*Credits for closing costs cannot be applied to discount points or loan-level price adjustments. Subject to credit approval and membership eligibility. Other restrictions may apply. Offer only available to members who live or work in Contra Costa County. Complete application must be submitted by 9/21/2014. Owner-occupied properties only. Not available for FHA or VA loans, or refinance of existing SAFE loan. See SAFE for details.

Join our Public Forum

If you have significant knowledge about an issue facing Lamorinda or one of its cities that requires more than the 350 words to which we must limit Letters to the Editor, don't despair! You can submit your letter to our Public Forum section. Just send your letter to letters@lamorindaweekly.com and let us know you'd like to be considered for the Public Forum.