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Virtually Neighbors

By Cathy Dausman



The online application, Nextdoor, could help Moraga resident Chuck Murray (on right) share his bumper crop of "pluots"- a hybrid plant grown from a plum and an apricot - with more people than just his own next door neighbor David Fuhrman. Photo Andy Scheck

organizer Jan Russell. "Two-thirds of our homeowners are members, and it is really useful in terms of communicating. It has been great."

Matt McLeod is active on Nextdoor in Moraga's Corliss neighborhood. "I took the lead in an effort to help keep neighbors in the area stay informed about a new development off Camino Ricardo. I think it has been useful and a great tool to keep neighbors informed about crime and safety issues as well," he said.

Cara Heilmann of Orinda said the primary reason she joined Nextdoor back in July 2012 was for her Neighborhood Watch Program. Her neighborhood has 64 members. "We have active block captains for almost every street in our neighborhood and we get together annually for a block party each summer," she said. "We continue to send invitations to neighbors to join as we consider this to be our main way to stay connected for all activities."

Gene Gottfried was their area captain for many years and has recently retired from the role, she said. Since then Heilmann, along with Jennifer Matthews and Jake Acevedo have shared the leadership role.

Orinda's Patti Young joined Nextdoor in August of 2012. She calls the site "an excellent way to communicate quickly with my neighbors in case of an emergency or simply to gain or give out information."

Young said she is "heavily involved" with the Community Emergency Response Team, the Orinda Citizen Corps Council, K6ORI radio group and Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Communication Support 245 team. "I know that these four organizations highly recommend that Lamorinda citizens use Nextdoor as one of their means to organize their neighborhoods for better communication prior to an emergency," Young said.

In contrast, Duncan Seibert, program manager for Lamorinda's Community Emergency Response Team, may be the lone naysayer in the crowd. "I may well be wrong but I have not had

More than 3,000 Lamorinda neighbors are learning who has extra fruits or vegetables to share or who has lost a pet without ever leaving their home in everyday conversations with neighbors - only in this 21st century version, it's carried out online. Conversations across the street or back fence have grown to include online social media conversations. Neighbors, meet one virtual neighborhood organizer - Nextdoor (<https://nextdoor.com>).

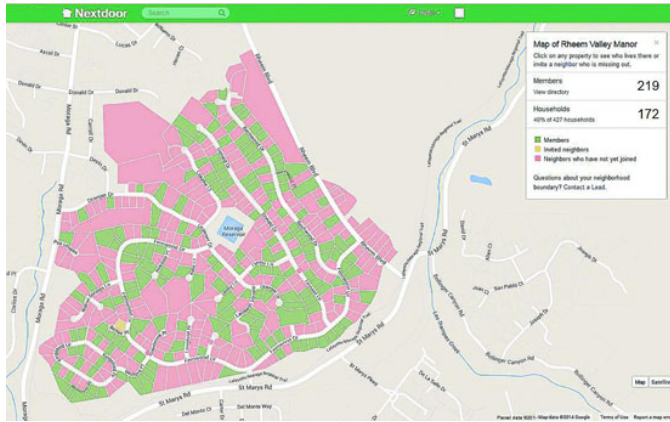
Local residents are using the social media application to inquire about who felt a recent earthquake or who saw a coyote wandering the streets, to learn about street closures or paving and community gardening projects, or to alert neighbors about unwanted door to door solicitors or burglars. They get recommendations for travel agents, painters, cleaning services, general contractors, sitters or tutors at the click of a button. They know who wants recycled moving boxes or grocery coupons, or where to buy furniture or sell pianos, books, games or bikes - all virtual everyday conversations neighbors have with neighbors.

"I have loved Nextdoor," said Moraga

good luck with it except for baby sitters and garage sales," he said. But Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda governments think otherwise; each has incorporated Nextdoor as a city-wide communications tool.

A Moraga police department press release explained via email that "town departments plan to share important news and updates, available services, programs, public events, and emergency notifications that are relevant to specific neighborhoods," and respond directly to Nextdoor member questions and comments. (See related story on page A9.)

"Of course there are privacy guidelines, and one can put out as much or as little information as he or she would like and a person can choose to only see listings from his or her own neighborhood or multiple areas," Young explained. "The developers of Nextdoor are genuine in wanting us to be happy with their application and frequently ask how they can make it better to fit our needs," she said. "Go check it out and encourage your neighbors to do so as well."



According to this Nextdoor map, 40 percent of the Rheem Valley Manor households in Moraga have registered on the site.

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