

# MOFD Increases Fire Season Staffing

By Nick Marnell

The fire season is off to an ominous start and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District has bulked up to confront it.

The board of directors unanimously approved fire chief Stephen Healy's recent request for an increase in minimum daily staffing from 17 to 19 firefighters through the end of November, which will allow the station 45 ambulance to be fully staffed during the wildfire season.

"This gives us increased operational capacity," said Healy. Since Medic 45 will be staffed full time, the crew at station 44 will no longer be primarily used on ambulance calls. As a result, the station 44 engine will be available 99 percent of the time during the fire season.

Already this summer two fires damaged homes in Lamorinda, and in July the district suppressed four vegetation fires. "Everything is under stress from three years of drought," said Healy, who noted that Northern

California has experienced 11 significant fires this season as opposed to three in Southern California. The chief added that historically, the worst fires occur in October and November.

The district estimates that the extra fire season staffing will cost \$250,000. But thanks to increased property tax revenue and savings realized from the new labor contract, the district projected a general fund surplus of more than \$400,000 before the additional personnel expense.

The firefighters union supported the action, but it admonished the district to take the time to evaluate its financial situation before making any long term decisions on staffing numbers, including the hiring of single-role paramedics instead of firefighters. "Before permanently restoring staffing back to 19 we feel it is equally important to look at restoring salary and benefits to our employees," said MOFD union representative Mark DeWeese.

# Two MOFD Seats Uncontested

Three Moraga-Orinda Fire District board seats are up for election this November. The races for two of the seats - Division 3 and Division 4 - are uncontested. Only the Moraga Division 1 race will appear on the November ballot: Nate Bell will challenge incumbent Kathleen Famulener.

Because the two races are uncontested, the Board of Supervisors has the option to appoint qualified candidates Brad Barber to the Orinda Division 4 seat and Steve Anderson to the seat in Division 3, which includes parts of both Moraga and Orinda. The supervisors

could require that the uncontested races be placed on the ballot, but according to Contra Costa County elections chief Joe Canciamilla, in the interest of saving money they rarely do.

What if voters wish to challenge the presumed board appointee with a write-in candidate? "They can circulate a petition and request a special election," said Canciamilla. "But it is a very expensive process."

Supervisor Candace Andersen said that the appointments would be announced at one of the regular Board of Supervisors meetings.

N. Marnell



**Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings**

**Next meeting:**  
**Wednesday, Sept. 3**  
**check website for updates**  
 (Go to [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org) as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)



**Contra Costa Board of Supervisors Meetings**

**Next meeting:**  
**Tuesday, Sept. 9**  
 Board Chamber room 107,  
 Administration Building,  
 651 Pine St. Martinez  
 (Agenda at <http://ca-contra-costa-county2.civicplus.com/4664/Board-Meeting-Agendas-and-Videos>)

## Civic News Lamorinda

### On the Bus

By Sophie Braccini

The Lamorinda School Bus Program transports approximately 1,400 students daily to the area's elementary, intermediate and high schools - that's about 25 percent of the student population. This fall, the Lamorinda School Bus Program will also fulfill the Acalanes Union High School District's transportation needs for students enrolled in its English Language Learners program.

Chris Learned, AUHSD associate superintendent, said that the district's 12 ELL students have very different native languages, with a majority being Chinese and Spanish speakers. The English Language Learners curriculum is only offered at Las Lomas High School but is available to any student in the district whose first language is not English and who needs support entering high school - the district provides the transportation.

"We evaluated our transportation costs and it was prohibitively more expensive to transport the ELL students ourselves rather than contracting out," said Learned. The ELL bus route has only eight stops, so most students are picked up at central locations.

The Lamorinda School Bus Program contracts with First Student for bus service. With its 21 buses, First Student is able to service 37 routes in Lamorinda. Orinda has the most - OIS alone has 10 different routes.

Program manager Juliet Hansen explains that state funding for school buses vanished years ago, but Contra

Costa County voters passed a half-cent transportation sales tax (Measure J) that funds about half of the cost of school bus service in Lamorinda. Parents pay the rest; the price of a round trip annual pass is \$468 for the 2014-15 school year.

The bus program is governed by a Joint Powers Authority called the Lamorinda School Bus Transportation Agency, which is comprised of elected officials from each of the cities and school districts and is currently chaired by Lafayette mayor Don Tatzin and staffed by Hansen and administrative aide Sue Graves.

"As the school year starts, we would like to remind our students and the whole population of a few important safety tips," said Hansen. Riders should always arrive five minutes early to the bus stop; stay within 10 feet of the bus; wait for permission from the driver before boarding or departing the bus; follow the driver's instructions about crossing the street and always cross in front of the bus, never behind it.

Hansen has a reminder for drivers, too. "All vehicles must stop on both sides when the bus displays flashing red warning lights and extends the stop signal arm. Vehicles may not pass until the flashing red lights and signals are turned off," she said.

There are still seats available on most of the school bus routes - for more information or to sign up, go to [www.lamorindaschoolbus.org](http://www.lamorindaschoolbus.org).

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