



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors
Wednesday, March 4, 7 p.m.
Moraga Library Community Room
1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga
For meeting times and agendas,
visit www.mofd.org

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, March 10, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

Emergency response information
and training:

Lamorinda Community
Emergency Response Team (CERT)
www.lamorindacert.org.

Share your thoughts, insights and
opinions with your community.

Send a letter to

the editor: letters@lamorindaweekly.com

Retired Firefighter Continues to Serve

By Nick Marnell



ConFire's Clive Savacool, center, is honored by the Board of Supervisors Feb. 10.

Photo provided

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Chief Jeff Carman grabbed his captains and shot out of the room in the middle of a 2014 Lafayette Emergency Services Task Force meeting. "One of my battalion chiefs has been injured," he said. Fire-

fighters had been battling a vegetation fire in Pittsburg most of the day, and that evening battalion chief Clive Savacool collapsed on the scene and was rushed to John Muir Hospital. It was the last fire that Savacool would fight, but it was not his last act of service to the firefighting community.

"Lying in my hospital bed, I knew the writing was on the wall and my time was limited," said Savacool. He had been hospitalized three times in his fire service career, and the cumulative effect of the consistent exposure to the smoke and flames resulted in a

serious respiratory ailment, forcing his retirement in July at age 36.

"I knew that there was a direct correlation between lung cancer and fire exposure," said Savacool. He questioned how his own injuries could have been avoided, and he determined that if there was a way to track firefighters' exposures to toxic materials, careers could be lengthened and lives may be saved. So he and a business partner formed Exposure Tracker, an Internet-based system that allows firefighters to monitor their exposures to those

toxins, which Savacool expects will result in much healthier firefighters.

"You can't hold these guys down," said Carman, speaking of his retired firefighters. "They continue to provide a positive impact for the fire service even though they're not here with the district today."

Savacool was assigned as a rookie firefighter to Lafayette station 15. He later covered Lafayette as a battalion chief and he recalled one of his first fires as the Lafayette commander. The incident involved a young woman who was doing yard work and noticed that a neighbor's house was on fire. She jumped a fence into the neighbor's yard, she ran into the bedroom and she carried out the disabled resident, saving his life.

"In my whole career this was the first time I'd ever seen anything like that, and it gave me a great introduction to the Lamorinda community," said Savacool.

The Board of Supervisors honored Savacool with a proclamation at its Feb. 10 meeting. Exuding the poise and confidence of a political candidate, Savacool thanked the board and his ConFire peers. Could a career in politics lie ahead?

"Nope. It's a thankless job, and it's too stressful," said the man who fought fires for 18 years.

Non-Competitive Compensation Package Plagues MOFD Recruiting Efforts

By Nick Marnell

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District is struggling to recruit and retain qualified firefighter-paramedics, and both management and the rank and file have expressed concern that increasing staffing to handle this year's fire season will be a challenge.

Moraga and Orinda are two of the gold standard communities in Contra Costa County. The 35,000 residents, whose median home value exceeds \$1.2 million and who earn some of the highest incomes in the Bay Area, allocate over 20 percent of their property taxes to their fire district, helping provide it with annual revenue of more than \$18 million. The revenue funds the operation of five fire stations, above the National Fire Protection Agency 2013 fire department survey average of 3.3 stations for districts the size of MOFD. The residents have paid for this enhanced level of service since the district's 1997 inception.

Despite serving such wealthy communities, MOFD firefighters do not keep pace financially with their peers. "They are one of the lowest paid and they have the worst health and retirement benefit package of the paid firefighters in the county," said Vince Wells, president of firefighters union Local 1230.

The plight of the MOFD firefighters evokes little sympathy from many, who cite the firefighters' high average salaries and benefits; 36 MOFD firefighters earned total compensation of over \$200,000 in 2014. But firefighters have recently departed the district for more lucrative

deals, potentially leaving MOFD as a veritable training ground and feeder system – likely not the scenario that residents envisioned 18 years ago. "It's a valid concern," said Fire Chief Stephen Healy. "It's a challenge for us because we compete in a regional job market, and other agencies offer better benefits than we do."

To aid in employee recruitment and retention, the district recently increased its health care premium contribution for firefighters. But its contribution for retiree medical insurance for new hires remains at the California Public Employees' Retirement System minimum, compared with the contribution of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, which pays the same amount in health care premiums for its retirees as it does for its active members. Most of the MOFD firefighters also pay a 9 percent subvention of the employer share of the district's pension contribution, while ConFire negotiated out the employee subvention in its latest contract. "No doubt, the ConFire deal added pressure to our district," said Healy.

The district employs 51 firefighters to cover its basic 51 weekly shifts, and to cover the shifts missed by those on vacation, sick, on disability or on a strike team. Last year MOFD increased its daily staffing from 17 to 19 firefighters during the height of the fire season. "We are concerned the district does not have the capacity to go to 19 this summer," said Mark DeWeese, MOFD union representative.

Healy agreed that increasing the staffing for fire season will be a challenge, but he said that MOFD has the capacity to staff at 19 by using overtime. Overtime is a fact of firefighting life, and paying overtime is less expensive than hiring additional firefighters. But it can exact a high human toll. Last year, as ConFire coped with its own overtime crisis, Wells said, "... I get concerned when overtime is so excessive that the firefighters don't want to work it and you're forcing them to."

As provided in the latest labor contract, MOFD has the right to hire single role paramedics to fill current vacancies. Either the district or the union can request other adjustments. "You can always renegotiate a contract," said district union representative Anthony Perry – like eliminating the firefighters' subvention of district pension costs or increasing the amount of the district contribution to cover retiree health care. "Those would be public policy decisions for the board to make," said Healy.

"Maintaining competitive wages and benefits for our employees is important to the district," said Alex Evans, MOFD board president, who would not elaborate.

The chief said that he does not expect the size of the current staff to impede district firefighting efforts. "We'll be looking at this every day through the summer, and it will have some impact on our ability to provide statewide mutual aid. But our first duty is to protect our own citizens."

State Senate Special Primary Election Registration Deadline March 2

Submitted by Joseph E. Canciamilla, county clerk-recorder and registrar of voters

Monday, March 2 is the voter registration deadline for the 7th State Senatorial District Special Primary Election to be held March 17. New voters must register and anyone who has moved or has had a name change must re-register.

Voters may register online at <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/register-to-vote/>. Voters may also obtain registration forms at government offices including City or County Offices and DMV locations. The completed form must be delivered to the Contra Costa County Elections Office at 555 Escobar Street in Martinez no later than 5 p.m. March 2 or be postmarked by March 2.

To be eligible to vote, a person must be a U.S. citizen who will be at least 18 years old by March 17 and not imprisoned or on parole for the conviction of a felony. Anyone who becomes a newly naturalized citizen after the March 2 deadline may register and vote between March 3 and March 17. New citizens may register at the Contra Costa County Elections Office at 555 Escobar Street in Martinez and must present his or her Certificate of Naturalization.

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