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Published March 25th, 2015

## Saint Mary's Field Lights Will Stay On Until 10 p.m.

*By Sophie Braccini*

At its March 13 meeting, the Moraga Town Council authorized Saint Mary's College to light the intramural field adjacent to the residential neighborhood, The Bluffs, for an additional hour at night until 10 p.m., 305 nights a year.

While the glare from the lights that illuminate the field at night bothers nearby neighbors, the sound, according to some Bluff's residents, is a bigger nuisance.

Saint Mary's College is located in what Gary Howard called a natural amphitheater, noting that if you add a westerly wind, the sound of the teams practicing on the intramural field carries up to the houses. "The constant screaming and yelling has changed our way of life," he said.

Bluffs resident Mark Genestro measured the decibel level in his house during intramural play. "It's 60 to 70 decibels, the noise of a vacuum cleaner 10 feet away," he said, adding that it's commercial area noise. The neighbors noted that the bell ringing stops at 9 p.m. on campus. And signs posted throughout the campus require students to be quiet after 9 p.m. Even the plea of a father citing that his little girls were unable to go to sleep at night did not tip the scale.

The council made its determination based on the college's commitment to improving the lighting system and significantly reducing the lights' glare. They were also swayed by Saint Mary's President Jim Donahue's personal commitment to discuss the issue with the neighbors and set up a response mechanism to address neighbors' complaints.

Councilmember Teresa Onoda was the only one who zeroed in on the noise issue. "Do you have any technical way to diminish the noise?" she pressed. Donahue did not have an answer, but did say that noise is part of what the activity entails. He promised that students will be reminded of their duty as good neighbors and will be asked to refrain from using profanity.

In the past, college representatives have stated that the extra hour is important for scheduling of recreational sports and practices for many students who work in retail or babysit for residents, and still need to have a place to practice in the evening.

"This issue has some history and it has created concerns about matters of trust between the college and the town of Moraga," acknowledged Donahue in his address to the council. "When I took over the presidency (a year and a half ago), one of my goals was fostering a positive relationship between the college and the town. Part of that is that we have a trust between us and our neighbors. ... I will be personally responsible for ensuring that the college follows through on what we say we will do."

The question of trust is a hot button issue for the neighbors. Several recalled the many years they had lived next to the college, enjoying every moment of it, including the games. "But in the last three years there has been no work with the neighborhood," said Peter Snap.

A town consultant examined the college's simulation of its new lighting system and felt confident that it would dramatically minimize the impact for many residents.

Four residents did speak in favor of the college extending play hours, saying that life goes on.

Moraga resident Barbara Simpson said complaining about the noise on the field is like people who bought a house near an airport complaining about airplane noise.

The college will install the new lights over the summer. The extended hours will start once the college makes the improvements. The council will review the issue one year after the 10 p.m. time begins.

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