



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors

Wednesday, May 20, 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, June 16, 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

**Please submit
Letters and Opinions:**
[letters@lamorinda
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weekly.com)

New Ambulances Rolling in to MOFD

By Nick Marnell

At its May 6 meeting the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board unanimously approved a \$425,000 expenditure for two new 2016 International TerraStar Leader ambulances, which will give the district a fleet of six ambulances, including two reserve vehicles. MOFD last purchased ambulances in 2008.

"Our two most active ambulances have been out of service 27 percent of the time," said fire chief Stephen Healy. "We're burning through transmissions, motors and brakes, and a cracked frame, in one case. We are

very tough on our ambulances."

The district apparatus committee, headed by battalion chief Felipe Barreto, recommended the purchase of new vehicles as opposed to remounting the current district modules on new chassis. "For one thing, we then wouldn't have reserve ambulances," said Healy. The chief noted that the new ambulances should last up to 15 years, while remounted modules onto new chassis will last maybe half that long. The cost of remounting was presented as about half the cost of a new purchase.

Healy explained that the new apparatus have beefier chassis, stronger power trains and are larger and heavier duty than the models being replaced. He allayed concerns that the new ambulances were so much bigger than the current units that they could not navigate all of the district roads. "Our fire engines can get to every street in the district," he said. "These are much smaller than our fire engines."

Barreto said that the ambulances should be delivered in the fall, and that the two new vehicles will likely

be deployed at station 41 in Moraga and station 44 in south Orinda. One reserve ambulance will remain at station 41, the other stored at Moraga's station 42.

The new Internationals will be purchased through the National Joint Powers Alliance, a Minnesota-based municipal national contracting agency. The district plans to send out a request for proposals this month for the lease financing.

ConFire-AMR Partnership Forges Ahead

By Nick Marnell

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District moved another step closer to providing emergency ambulance service in Contra Costa County on May 12 when the Board of Supervisors, acting as the ConFire board of directors, authorized fire chief Jeff Carman to execute an agreement between the district and American Medical Response, the current provider of county ambulance service. The agreement details the relationship between the district and AMR if ConFire is awarded

the 5-year Contra Costa County emergency ambulance service contract effective Jan. 1, 2016. The county regions up for bid exclude the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, which provide their own ambulance transport service.

After a district consultant reported in 2014 that it would be financially feasible for ConFire to provide ambulance service for the county, AP Triton, LLC, a fire consultant, advised the district that the most suitable and cost effective way to provide that service was to partner with a private ambulance company. Through a competitive bidding process, ConFire chose to partner with AMR, under a subcontractor agreement with the district.

Should the county award ConFire the ambulance contract AMR, as the ambulance subcontractor, will provide the district its own personnel and equipment and will also be responsible for maintaining and upgrading the ambulance fleet. Over

the five years of the deal ConFire will pay AMR not more than \$188 million for this service, which Carman explained would be the district's maximum financial exposure. ConFire will bill and collect patient fees and charges, reimbursements from healthcare providers and other emergency ambulance transport revenue to cover those expenses.

"Even at the maximum costs, this proposal will make financial sense to the district?" asked John Gioia, board chair.

"Absolutely," said Carman.

Carman later pointed out indirect benefits of the relationship with AMR, including consolidation of personnel and other potential costs savings. "AMR has huge buying power for medical supplies," he said. "At the same time, we have better buying power for fuel since we use so much, and they can take advantage of that."

Erik Rohde, AMR general manager for Contra Costa County, discussed the synergy of merging dispatch personnel. "ConFire's dis-

patch center is in Pleasant Hill and ours is in Sacramento," he said. "By putting them in the same room, the dispatchers will have the ability to communicate real time, face to face, rather than over a phone or computer."

And one of Carman's top frustrations will frustrate him no longer. "We won't send a fire company and an ambulance to everything anymore," he said. "Now we can send just what is needed and closest. This adds capacity to our response reliability."

The Board of Supervisors plans to approve the new county ambulance contract in July. If ConFire is awarded the deal, and the district successfully enters into the subcontract with AMR, it will have joined forces with its long-time rival.

"We will share mission and vision," said the chief. "Instead of competing, we will be working as a single team."

"Truly this relationship will be better for the agencies and the customer."

Front page

School Bus Program



Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School students start filling up buses.

Photo Cathy Tyson

Ten buses are transporting kids daily to OIS, the program's most popular destination.

Originally it took some convincing of the Contra Costa Transportation Authority that Lamorinda's share of the sales tax money should go toward reducing traffic instead of building road improvements. Maintaining and improving the county's transportation system are the focus of the agency that manages the sales tax program paid for by Measure C and now Measure J. Passed in 1988, Measure C provided revenue to pay for programs such as a BART extension, freeway improvements, and more. Measure C sunsetted in March 2009.

Voters actually agreed to tax themselves again to carry on with the transportation improvements. With 71 percent of the vote, Measure J was approved in November

2004 to continue the county-wide half-cent sales tax for 25 more years beyond the original expiration date of Measure C. Contra Costa County residents' Measure J tax money paid for the new fourth bore of the Caldecott Tunnel, improvements on Highway 680, over \$350 million for local streets and road maintenance, and improvement and enhancing transit not only for local school kids but for seniors and people with disabilities.

Kathy Fernbacher and Stephanie Sorensen were a couple of the original moms who got the ball rolling. Other key players include Don Tatzin, Amy Worth, Bobbie Landers and Steven Falk. Fernbacher had moved from the south end of Orinda to the Sleepy Hollow area and was concerned about the traffic jams in her new neighborhood. She and other concerned parents attended "meeting

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after meeting," said Fernbacher. "We just kept fighting," explaining that parents would like to spend the tax revenue to push for school buses. She recalled, "Eventually they gave in." In the fall of 1994, after two years of planning and negotiation, the first buses got rolling.

"It really did work," commented Ann Grodin who was part of the effort from the start, explaining that studies showed the bus program actually got cars off the road, especially on Moraga Way. "As bad as it is now, (traffic) was worse then." She also remembers the "hard fought vote" 20 years ago to use the tax money for buses, but in her opinion the results are amazing.

The three towns, in cooperation with local school districts, embraced the grassroots effort and formed a joint powers authority that oversees the program. Originally, the Lamorinda school bus program was approved only for a five year pilot, contingent upon surveys and statistical support to prove its value. Now the program, with professional drivers from First Student, has a fleet of clean diesel buses that are equipped with the latest safety features – including seat belts.

Early registration is already open, with special pricing offered for those who sign up by June 15. The round trip annual bus pass will cost parents \$455 for the school year, which comes out to \$2.53 per day or \$1.27 per ride. Keep in mind that 62 percent of the school bus program budget is funded by a portion of your sales tax dollars.

Orinda

Ties That Bind

Orindans Bob and Maryette Thompson have welcomed a number of exchange students over the years, and highly recommend the experience. "All of my kids have really gotten to know these students. They really became part of the family."

Chandler Visher and Deborah Lambert concur. Their student, Michael Čížek, became like a brother to their boys, and joined the family in

Santa Barbara for a Thanksgiving visit with Lambert's parents and a trip to Yosemite. Their most memorable moments, though, were spent in Las Vegas. It was one of the places Čížek most wanted to see while he was in America.

It is these kinds of experiences that were precisely what Eisenhower was hoping when he gave his memorable "The Chance for Peace" speech

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in 1953, and what Landers strives for in organizing each visit by a Czech student. She reported recently that a host family is still urgently needed from August 2015 through January 2016 for Karel Balogh. If you can help, call Landers at (925) 254-8260.

Then, follow the adventures of the Orinda Klub Tábor on Facebook: www.facebook.com/OrindaKlub.

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