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Burton Valley Elementary School fifth-graders are intent on helping to bring back declining numbers of monarch butterflies by planting milkweed seedlings and distributing them throughout Lamorinda. From left: Joel Clarke, Rhett Skvarna, Tommy Hillman, Mason Archer, Logan Ketcham, Jonathan Clarke, Chloe Burrows and Jenna Barton. Kim Curiel is the garden coordinator and Laura Lowell teaches science. Photo Chris Lavin

Planting the Seeds of Hope

Fifth-graders dig in to bring back monarch butterflies

By Chris Lavin

It's more like a memory of past springs and summers, rather than a ubiquitous current image: Children running through fields or playgrounds, a butterfly net aloft, in pursuit of their objects of fascination. Captured, examined, gently released. The trouble is, it's not happening much now. Because there just aren't that many butterflies.

Monarch butterfly populations here are in especially serious trouble. The insect-devoted Xerces Society has them down by 50 percent, which is better than on the other side of the Rocky Mountains, where populations are down 90 percent. Yet there is hope, and it starts with every last fifth grader in the garden of Burton Valley Elementary School in Lafayette holding a milkweed seed in one hand

and poking a hole in the dirt with the other.

"We're focusing almost everything on milkweed," said master gardener Kim Curiel. They're growing flowering nectar plants, too, but those aren't quite as important because monarchs feed many flowers. "The monarchs are going to die out altogether unless they have milkweed."

...continued on page A12

Advertising

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

News	A2 - A12
Life in Lamorinda	B1 - B10
Not to be Missed	B8-B9
HOW TO CONTACT US	B9
Food	B10
Service Directory	B10
Sports	C1 - C5
Classified	C2
Shop Moraga	C6
Our Homes	D1 -D16
This Week Read About:	
Rent Control Discussed	A3
Happy Valley Sidewalks	A2
Moraga Town Center	
Homes Approved	A4
Recreation Use on MOSO Land	A5
Crime Cam Pilot Program	A6
Lamorindans Stuck in Storm	B2
Dementia Discussion	B5
Boys' Lacrosse	C2

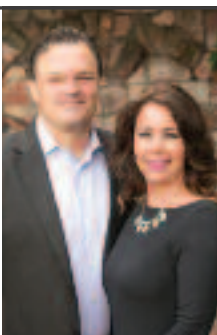
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Lamorinda School Bus Program Celebrates 20 Years

By Cathy Tyson



Bus line at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School

Photo Cathy Tyson

About two decades ago a group of plucky parents knew there had to be a better way to get their kids to school. In one of the very rare collaborations in our tri-town area, some parents, the towns and the school districts worked diligently to create something from nothing. Together they were the first in the county to advocate for using Lamorinda's share of Measure C, then Measure J funds – a voter approved half-cent sales tax in Contra Costa County – for reducing car trips to local schools on school buses. While other municipalities preferred to use the money on freeway widening or other construction related projects, the effort here focused

on using those funds to cover roughly two-thirds of the cost of providing bus service for Lamorinda students. Parents pay the remaining third.

Now there is a fleet of 21 buses that serve Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, saving 660,420 vehicle trips during the school year, transporting over 1,200 students to school every day, for the bargain basement rate to parents of \$1.27 per ride. This year the Lamorinda School Bus Program is celebrating 20 years of congestion relief.

While it's not uncommon to hear complaints about traffic, those big yellow buses hold up to 71 elementary students. Imagine the increased volume

of cars at peak times if each of those 71 kids in a single bus was chauffeured individually to school by a parent or guardian? Bigger kids obviously take up more space, says Juliet Hansen, the program manager who has been running the bus program since the beginning. She estimates 50 to 60 middle school kids can fit in a large bus.

It's a bus bonanza at Orinda Intermediate School every day, probably due to the long commute for families who live in a number of neighborhoods north of the freeway from OIS, which is at the south end of town.

... continued on page A8

Summer Camps C3-C4

A listing of 50 local summer camps – page C3.

Fire Districts A8

ConFire Moves Forward with AMR Partnership – page A8.

Life in Lamorinda B1-B10

Lamorinda Weekly writer wins first for education coverage – page B3.



Sports C1-C5

Two girls' lacrosse teams advance to NCS – page C2.



Our Homes D1-D16

Accessing wealth and prosperity through proper feng shui – page D10.

