

National Night Out in Lamorinda Aug. 4

By Cathy Dausman



Sitting in a fire truck from Station 15 in Lafayette was one of the highlights for this young Lamorinda resident as part of last year's National Night Out event. Photo Carol Yates

Some people consider it a chance to catch up with neighbors on a summer's eve, enjoy tasty snacks and let the kids explore police and fire vehicles up close, but National Night Out also has a serious side. "When disaster strikes Lamorinda our first responders are going to be pushed to the limits," says Moraga-Orinda Fire District Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein. "Residents will need to be able to take care of their own basic needs and help their neighbors. National Night Out is a great event to start

planning how you will become better prepared."

National Night Out began in 1984 under the guidance of the non-profit National Association of Town Watch. That first year, 2.5 million neighbors took part across 400 communities in 23 states. In Lamorinda, various neighborhoods in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda are again hosting neighborhood events, this year on Aug. 4.

Last year, Lafayette Emergency Preparedness Commissioners Carol Yates, Sherry Hoover and George

Figone and Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team program manager Duncan Seibert each hosted National Night Out events for their respective Lafayette neighborhoods. "We probably lost a lot of steam last year [with attendance figures]," Yates admitted, a fact she attributes to residents on vacation. Still, Yates estimates her event attendance at around 30, many of those out of area visitors. The children and teens, especially, all enjoyed the police and fire vehicle presence, Yates said. She plans to go door to door again, delivering invitations and making it very easy for her neighbors to learn about NNO.

Former Moraga mayor Lynda Deschambault hosted a small group in her Donald Drive neighborhood last year and is hosting again this year, hoping for an even better turnout. "It was great to get the important conversations started," said Deschambault, a CERT member.

Moraga's Diana Graham facilitated the visit of a fire truck, a police car and a town council member, and added some ice cream and associated accoutrements for her neighborhood last year. "Some people had potlucks. It just depends on what you would like to do. My house burned down in the Oakland Hills fire more than 20 years ago," Graham explained, "but every summer it is just like yesterday. It is good to

have something that people can take home with them to work up their plan, their kit and to be informed."

Mimi Wilson has promoted National Night Out for Orinda's Lost Valley neighborhood since Orinda started it four years ago. Wilson said their neighborhood, which she describes as one long cul-de-sac, also hosts an owners' association picnic in September. Lost Valley meets at an area barn, where they bring in hay bales. "The kids think it's fun to come to the horses and get their picture taken," Wilson said. Lost Valley events have included candy bar awards for those who recognize which neighbors live in which houses. "We invited Don Gabriel neighbors to join us, [too]," Wilson said.

Don Gabriel used to host his own event but resident Susan Horrocks said they have opted out for the last three years for a variety of reasons, including vacation conflicts and some residents' irregular work hours. Horrocks credits former neighbor Beccie Kunzman for promoting National Night Out through her Emergency Preparedness Commission affiliation.

Recently, Kunzman said, the Orinda Citizen Corp Council has organized the event and promoted get-togethers. "It is more of a Neighborhood Watch and emergency preparedness activity. All three police departments and Mor-

aga-Orinda Fire District are huge supporters," Kunzman said, adding, "I think it is important to get together."

Patti Young is the current head of OCCC. "I think she may have set a record on the number of events she attended last year," said Kunzman. Young believes local participation in National Night Out is an important tool for helping us slow down just enough to spend some time to get to know our neighbors a little bit more. "It is also the perfect time to make lists of those neighbors with special needs and those who have special skills or equipment to use in times of an emergency, such as a tree falling or a fire or an earthquake. This is a good time to talk about communication; who in the neighborhood has FRS/GMRS radios or is a Ham [radio] operator just in case other forms of communication are down," Young said. "Enjoy your neighbors," she added.

Graham emphasized that Lamorinda residents need to be ready. "We need to be organized. We need to help each other to see what might happen in our community. With the fire danger so high this year we want to get the word out on preparedness as much as possible."

To participate in or to form your own neighborhood National Night Out event, email lamorindanightout@gmail.com or call Dennis Rein at (925) 258-4599.

Controversial Sanctuary

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Sufism Reoriented Sanctuary construction site

Photo Adam Blake

"On the one hand I was surprised at the volatility of the negativity and how it was focused," Carpenter said. "On the other hand, often times really important projects in the world require a certain amount of opposition because it creates a kind of pool of energy that we were therefore able to rise to."

Carpenter described how the project approval process served as a catalyst for the previously private group to get more involved in the community. Sufism Reoriented created a newsletter, met with non-Sufi neighbors and launched several social service programs including the White Pony Express, which donates unused food from restaurants, and the General Store, which gives clothing and supplies to those in need.

Saranap community members had specific concerns regarding the size and architecture of the proposed build-

ing, claiming it would be inconsistent with and uncharacteristic for the neighborhood. Other concerns included tree removal, increased traffic and parking. The temple will have 74 on-site spaces as opposed to the 125 that would have been required pursuant to the Off-Street Parking Ordinance because many members pledged to walk and others pledged to form carpools. The county will monitor this conditional approval for several years after the new sanctuary opens.

The new sanctuary will be 66,000 square feet, two-thirds of which will be underground. The design was envisioned by its spiritual director or "Murshida," Carol Weyland Conner, and designed by the Philip Johnson/Alan Ritchie architectural firm. The building consists of one large dome in the middle with smaller ones surrounding it.

According to Carpenter, the circles are symbolic for some of the group's guiding beliefs.

"The idea is that essentially everyone is equidistant from God. So consequently the circle represents that basic notion. There are no corners, there are no edges, there's nobody out on the edge," Carpenter said.

Many community members are still unhappy with this new addition to the neighborhood, though resistance to a proposed "Saranap Village" by the Hall Equities Group has taken the spotlight (see related story on page A3). Overall, things seemed to have smoothed out since construction on the project began.

"Since we worked out the initial details, I've found the neighborhood has been very amicable, supportive of the process moving forward," Andersen said.

New Electronic Sign

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Tuck did some research on sign readability using information from Electronic Signs, a competitor to AdArt that built the sign in Moraga, and found that the acceptable exposure time for a message at 35 to 45 miles per hour (for readability) is 8 to 18 seconds. "However at this location traveling at 35 to 45 miles per hour, the maximum view time is more like 2 to 4 seconds and my observations suggest that the sign is currently changing every 5 seconds, which is unacceptable for the character size and viewing distance," he said.

Tuck said that someone who is focused on reading a sign with a non-routine message that is difficult to read because of small characters, obstructions and short view time, is at risk of not having sufficient reaction

time to break if there is an emergency 100 to 200 feet ahead.

"The messages change every 8 seconds, which is the proper duration," said McClure. "The location of the sign was determined by the town, the requirement being that it was installed where the old sign was." McClure believes that the location is appropriate, that even if people are not completely cognizant of it, the messages are subliminally assimilated. If there is too much information to see in the short distance, he recommended shortening the messages.

When the sign was first presented to the council in April of 2014, Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram listed possible distraction of drivers, especially at night, as a potential risk

associated with the new sign. But Ingram cited a report by Gene Hawkins with Texas A&M University that indicated that the installation of digital on-premise signs did not lead to a statistically significant increase in crashes on major roads. This study, however, defines on-premise digital signs as signs located on the same property as the business it is advertising, which is not the case of the new community sign. Other studies have been conducted to evaluate the safety risks posed by electronic or video signs, and most concluded that overall impacts on traffic safety are likely to be small.

Ingram said Comcast will install a dedicated Internet line to allow remote operation of the sign, but that a date has not been given to the town yet.

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