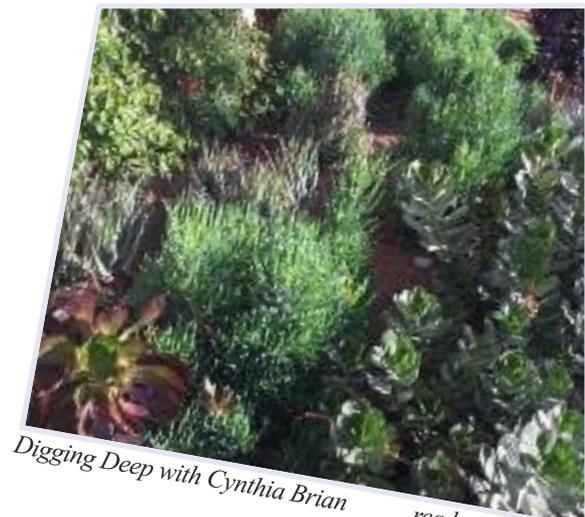


Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 09 Issue 16 Wednesday, October 7, 2015



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Plugging In

Electric car trend leading to upgrades at home

By Chris Lavin



At Norseman it's a family affair with sons Darryl and Travis Johnson working alongside their father, Randy. Their Lafayette client sports their favorite license plate.

Photo Chris Lavin

Far gone are the days when Fred Flintstone powered a car with his feet. Also gone are the days of the giant gasoline guzzlers of "American Graffiti." Welcome, now, to the days of volts and amps.

The large national and also very

much local trend toward going electric turns out not to be as simple as running an extension cord out to the driveway. While there used to be a time when an electric car could be plugged in to just about any outlet, times have changed.

Today's cars need big power for fast

charging. Most require the installation of electric vehicle supply equipment, or EVSE in the parlance of the day. And unless care is taken, the supply chain can get hot, quite literally.

"When Chevy Volts came in they were catching fire in the garage," said

Gint Federas of Lafayette, a photographer for Lamorinda Weekly who has owned a variety of electric cars. "Sometimes the most simple way to charge is not the most efficient."

While the Moraga-Orinda Fire District hasn't seen any house fires start directly because of electric car issues, special trainings about car fires have started to incorporate concerns about how people are "heating up" their garages.

"We haven't seen any fires directly because of that," said MOFD firefighter-paramedic Brittany McMahon. "But people can't plug their cars into a regular outlet. It's definitely a new thing."

When you find yourself among electricians and savvy electric car owners, it is easy to check out of the conversation. There is talk of amps and wattage. There is talk of overload. Talk of circuit breaks. Talk of bypasses and breakers. One finds oneself thinking "What's for dinner?" while talk of applications of electricity and circuitry abound. Electrician Randy Johnson breaks into this line of culinary thinking by saying, "Yeah, that can start a fire."

"What?" Turns out that, yeah, bad circuitry can start a fire.

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