

# Friendly Drop-Offs at Local Fire Stations Keep Spirits Up

By Chris Lavin



Moraga firefighters Dave Iman, Mark DeWeese and Andrew Leach with goods dropped off during the week, including a box of See's candy, a Nation's pie and a mound of homemade muffins. Photo Chris Lavin

You never know what you might have to deal with as a firefighter: the proverbial cat in a tree, horrible things like car accidents, an unruly nursing home resident, then, of course, actual fires.

Yet something surprising that firefighters throughout Lamorinda often deal with is a ring at the door, to find a local resident holding a contribution – like a chicken, or a bicycle ... or grenades?

"We've had live grenades dropped off," said Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Stephen Healy in a voicemail. You have to think: Who keeps live grenades? "And m1000 fire-crackers," he added. Those are more than 10 times more powerful than an m80. Don't want to have too many of those lying around. Or even one.

While it turns out that some enterprising East Bay residents have figured out that the good old local fire department is a safe place to drop off things that might have become a nuisance, such as a rooster, or even a laying hen

that turns out to squawk a little more loudly than expected in the early morning hours, Lamorinda firefighters mostly receive good goods. A recent visit to Station 41 in Moraga revealed a table holding a box of See's candy, a pie from Nation's and a big stack of homemade muffins, all unsolicited.

Once a frantic resident rushing to the airport stopped by because he couldn't get the padlock open on his luggage. That is an unusual request, however. One firefighter website keeps a list of unusual things dropped to fire stations: a coral snake in a two-liter bottle, a pug in a dog carrier, leaking dynamite.

"Most of what we get are thank-you gifts," said Mark DeWeese of Station 41. The station used to receive a lot of "sharps" packages, those red medical waste containers full of things like syringes used by diabetics. "Most of those go to the police departments now. But we still get a lot of medications." The firefighters tote them to a big locker out back to wait for recycling time.

In recent years residents are becoming more aware that to dispose of medications by flushing them down the toilet or tossing them into a landfill pollutes the groundwater table and the Bay, so they are more likely to drop off bottles of old pills at a fire station. And years ago, all fire stations were made to be "safe drops" for unwanted babies. Ring the bell, hand over the child, no questions asked – a program that has been credited with cutting down on newborn child abandonment and mortality.

"Thankfully we haven't seen any babies dropped off in the Lamorinda area in more than a decade," said Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Operations Chief Lon Goetsch. A baby dropped off a couple of years ago in a Santa Ana station was recently reunited with the four firefighters who took her in. She was immediately adopted by a local family shortly after her birth and came back to re-meet her four "uncles."

"No, we don't get too many babies," DeWeese said. He looked thankful.

# This Is Not a New Year's Resolution Column

By Nick Marnell

Why bother writing about resolutions, when you know they will be broken? Like mine: I resolve to stop chewing gum in 2016. But why print that in a newspaper article? It makes much more sense to write: I predict that I will break my New Year's resolution to stop chewing gum by Jan. 5.

And to those of you who think I am not qualified to write a prediction column? Don't forget: for 2014, I predicted that Moraga real estate prices were going south. And last year, I predicted that I would keep this job through 2015. The jury is still out on that one.

So here we go.

I predict that the San Francisco Giants will win the World Series in 2016. It's an even year, right? How far out on a limb am I going here? Besides, now that I am the first columnist to commit to this in print, I can be blamed if the Giants don't win it. It takes the heat off the team. "It's that darned newspaper reporter in the

East Bay who caused this. It's his fault!"

I predict that Candace Andersen will win re-election to the Board of Supervisors in 2016. Again, not a reach, considering that nobody has challenged her. And now you know the secret to writing prediction columns: Stick to the sure-things.

Here's another sure-thing. That every single male in Lamorinda (and planet earth), as soon as he hears an Adele song come on the radio, will change the station within two seconds. (That was too easy.)

I predict that, no matter how many new restaurants open in Lafayette next year, it will still be impossible to get a seat at Chow when you want one.

No matter how much rain we get this season, even if it is 400 percent of average, I predict that the East Bay Municipal Utility District will come up with new rationale to raise our water rates again in 2016.

With the failure of station 46,

and the renovation of fire station 16 and the rebuild of fire station 43 occurring simultaneously, I predict the residents of north Orinda and western Lafayette will secede from their districts and form their own volunteer fire department in 2016.

All of the nonsense about predicting the economy based on who wins the election, who wins the Super Bowl, whether the first baby born is a boy or girl, I say, go with my prediction, which has never failed me: if the S&P 500 rises over 15 percent, it will be a good year financially.

In the old days, before the Internet, it was much easier to get away with making outrageous predictions in the newspaper, because that newspaper would be thrown out within a week. Now, we've got to live with this column online for eternity. So, I close with a prediction that you can take to the bank: My editor will remove this column from our website on Dec. 31.

Happy New Year, everyone!



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