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With Town's Help, Volleyball Courts No Longer 'Moraga Pond' Again

By Sophie Braccini



Photo Andy Schreck

The truth must be told: for years Moraga's sand volleyball courts at the Commons were barely usable.

"Drainage was clogged and the sand was from the delta, so it had a lot of dirt in it, making it hard packed," recalls Rob Browning, head volleyball coach at Saint Mary's College. In winter, water would stagnate in the sagging courts, getting it its nickname of "Moraga Pond."

The sorry state was going to sign the death warrant of the courts, as they were scheduled to be removed. That is, until the college took an interest in them and started, sometimes painfully, to use them.

Saint Mary's has had a beach volleyball team since 2012 and needed two courts in order to host an NCAA match, "and we only have one court on campus," Browning said. In order to make the courts usable the team would have to till the sand to make it soft enough to play on, and if it rained it became a mess again.

Because the NCAA has adopted women's beach volleyball as a championship sport, beach volleyball for girls is growing rapidly. "Saint Mary's team has done extremely well," says Browning, "We have been one of the best teams in Northern California." The town decided to do its part to support the local athletes and decided to renovate the courts.

Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram consulted with Browning on design issues. "They wanted some input on the sand, standards, court size, etc.," said Browning. A construction contract was awarded to Integra Construction Services, Inc. to complete renovations in the amount of \$133,422, including the high-quality sand the college recommended.

Because of the MOU signed between the town and the college (see article about shared facilities) Saint Mary's does not pay to use the courts. But others do, and according to the Kimberley Nelson, Park and Recreation Coordinator, other groups have been renting the location and it is booked throughout the summer. "There are people playing there now all the time, even during the concerts," she said. Nelson adds that the hourly rental fee for the courts is \$24 for individuals, \$18 for nonprofits and \$35 for commercial entities.

To see the real competitive games, like against Stanford and Cal, residents will have to wait for March and April during the competition season. The Saint Mary's team does not use the beach courts at all in the fall because they play indoor volleyball at that time. They will use them starting in January for some practices. That's when the team will see how the courts really do, and sometimes in inclement weather.

"By all appearances and having watched the construction process it looks like they've done everything they needed to do," added Browning.

For the first two seasons Saint Mary's Beach Volleyball record was 19-4 with multiple wins over Stanford, Cal, Santa Clara, San

Francisco, Pacific and all other Norcal teams. They also sent a pair to the national championships those first two seasons. This past season SMC's record was 17-6 with wins over Stanford, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Pacific, and Oregon. The team finished second in the WCC championships and were the only team in the WCC to

win matches against Pepperdine, which was ranked second in the nation when the lady-Gaels played them. The Lady Gaels also swept the WCC Player of the Year awards with Player of the Year Dalas Clara, San Francisco, Pacific, and Dodd, Freshman of the Year Lindsey Knudsen, and Defensive Player of the Year Mary Hernandez.

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Rare Rash of Robberies Alarm Moraga Residents

Moraga police are working on evidence to identify suspects in four residential robbery attempts that occurred in a 24-hour period around June 21 on Draeger, Woodford and Buckingham Drives. The rash of events is highly unusual in normally peaceful Moraga.

Two of the events were thwarted when the would-be robbers heard homeowners, and wisely decided to depart. In two of these incidents, the suspects entered through unlocked doors or windows.

There's no information linking coincidental robberies in Orinda that occurred on the same day, said acting Police Chief Jon King. "This

is an extremely safe community and a great place to live."

He urges residents to take simple precautions to prevent these crimes of opportunity - lock your windows and doors, and if you have a home alarm, turn it on.

On June 9, Moraga police reported that in the first five months of 2016, burglaries are down nearly 61 percent and thefts were down over 20 percent over the same time period in 2015.

Anyone with information about these incidents should call the Moraga Police Department at (925) 888-7055. — C. Tyson

Closure of Rheem Boulevard Now Scheduled for July 5

The major repair of a section of Rheem Boulevard between Moraga Road and St. Mary's Rd was supposed to start on June 15. Even the signs posted at both access to the arterial said so. But no work has started yet.

Moraga Public Work Director Edric Kwan confirmed that Summerhill had the permission to close the road since they had all of the needed approvals. "The town is requesting for Summerhill to update their signage and have it be clearer on the closure location," said Kwan.

Summerhill confirmed that they had agreed to schedule the road closure to start on June 15. "Summerhill and the town worked together to finalize some design components, which took longer than expected," said Summerhill's John Hickey. This was completed around June 21 and the contractor is now tentatively rescheduling the road closure to start on July 5. Hickey promised that the road closure signs would be covered temporarily until they can be updated.

"We'll also ask the town to provide an update on their website," he said. How much will this delay affect the completion of the road rehabilitation has not been clarified yet. — S. Braccini

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