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Lafayette

New Jennifer Russell Building is Awesome



The Jennifer Russell Building is home to Camp Awesome this summer.

Photo Andy Scheck

Russell fought hard to revive the facility and helped establish the Community Center Foundation, which continues to raise funds today. Little by little the facility continues to be updated; however the only new structure is the Jennifer Russell building.

The \$2.4 million multipurpose room opened on October 1 and replaced the aging Manzanita room, which was built in 1954. The modern, energy efficient 5,300 square foot space is used for summer camps, sports activities, fundraisers and private events. For 12 years Russell pushed for the new building and felt relieved when it rose to the top of the priority list.

"I think the city looked at this community center as financially very successful," Russell said. "It seemed that a good thing to reinvest into something that successful so that it can continue to grow which is exactly what the new building allowed us to do: offer a lot more than we ever could before."

Camp Awesome is using the space this summer and has strongly felt the benefits of the new building. Counselor Michael Fink described upgrades such as air conditioning, extra space for indoor sports, and embedded TVs for movies and videogames.

"The bathrooms and drinking fountains are the best part because we no longer have to do continuous bathroom trips to the public restrooms and no longer have to fill up coolers and use cups to give the kids water," Fink said.

Russell was delightfully surprised at the demand to use the new space, which she says has exceeded expectations. Highlights from the past year include the haunted house on Halloween and the Lafayette Partners in Education fundraiser. Even more unexpected however, was when she first learned that the building would be named for her. In fact, almost a year after completion she still is getting used to seeing her name displayed in shiny,

white letters over the entrance of the structure.

"It's still a surprise...when I drive in and I see my name up there I go 'what is that?'" Russell said.

Russell was caught off guard at a general staff meeting when the mayor at the time, Brandt Andersson, made an appearance and suggested the building should be named in her honor.

"I couldn't hold it back and I just took my coat and put it over my head and started crying," Russell said. "Commissioner Singer slid me some Kleenexes and I kept thinking 'get it together.'"

Ironically, Russell had helped write the original naming policy with the intention of recognizing volunteers and was not expecting a staff member to be suggested, let alone herself. Russell's fellow staff members, however, felt strongly that she deserved the recognition.

"Jennifer was there for the repurposing of the school; she helped develop every aspect of the center

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since the city took over the site and it's fitting that the first brand new building on site be named after the person that work so hard to build a center that the community could be proud of," Recreation Supervisor Jonathan Katayanagi said.

With only a couple of months left on the job, Russell noted that she's never been bored a single day in her career, but as a self-described nature nut, looks forward to having time to enjoy the surroundings and explore national parks.

"It's been a great ride and I feel good about handing the baton to someone who is going to be as energetic, and have the passion to keep things going," Russell said.

"I've never been bored at this job, not one day. There's always surprises. You never know what the day's going to bring, both positive and negative. It's a wonderful career, especially in a town that you know well and you want the best for. So you do your darndest and you can become very passionate.

"Over the years there are many times that I'd said, 'I don't have time for that.' So I have to say I'm looking forward to finally having the time for the things that I keep saying I don't have time for. I love to hike, I'm a real nature nut so I'm really looking forward to going to some national parks that I've always wanted to go to."



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Letters to the Editor

Deceptive Headline and Photo Intentionally Misled Readers

I am in disbelief that the editor of the Lamorinda Weekly allowed the headline to read as follows: "Womenpriests Ordain First Orinda Woman Catholic Priest." (June 29.) This headline is completely fictitious. The casual reader would read the headline and assume that the

Catholic Church is allowing women priests. Nothing could be further from the truth. Only a careful reading of the article revealed that this purported ordination had nothing to do with the Roman Catholic Church.

Why the fallacious and obfuscating headline?

To make matters worse, the photograph of Ms. Truelson, dressed in a priest outfit, holding

hosts purporting to be the Body of Jesus Christ, was extremely offensive, insulting and distasteful. The photograph was a mockery directed toward those Roman Catholics who revere and venerate the Real Presence of our Savior.

Ann L. Vaccaro
Orinda

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. Visit www.lamorindaweekly.com for submission guidelines. email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Moraga

Naming a Park

Parks and recreation Director Jay Ingram indicated that the staff's suggestion was Dos Rios (two rivers) since two creeks converge on the park's site.

Fritzky suggested that rather than choosing a name immediately, the commission should agree on a process. Ingram noted that there was no such thing as a park naming

policy and that the commission had the authority to make a recommendation to the town council.

Bob Giomi proposed that each commissioner propose five names each and open the selection to the public via an online poll. Commissioners shied away from involving the public and rather preferred asking the opinion of local groups such

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as the Historical Society or the Park and Hacienda Foundations.

The commissioners will each send a few names to Ingram, who will circulate them among the local groups. At their next meeting, on July 19, the commissioners will review the list and decide on the next step of their naming process.

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