

Published March 8th, 2017

Fighting for Lamorinda sanctuary status

By *Sophie Braccini*



From left, Lynn Hsu and Clara Fuchshuber meet in Lafayette to prepare their next campaign. Photo Sophie Braccini

Lamorinda.

The three women graduated from Campolindo High School in 2011. They went their separate ways to college but stayed in touch. They are now back in Lamorinda, either working, or studying as pre-med students.

Politics was not on their radar too much during college, but the last presidential election ignited their passion. "We felt so powerless and anxious after the election was over," remembers Fuchshuber, "we wanted to make a difference."

Shepard found the website MiJente that automatically sends petitions and letters to elected officials on the subject of sanctuary cities. They decided that the cookie-cutter approach would not work for Lamorinda and they took action on their own.

The trio recruited Lafayette friends Allie Walker and Caroline Silvanito who helped with the research on the topic and at presentations. "We also started canvassing," says Hsu. Going door-to-door was not the easiest for the self-proclaimed quiet young women to do, Fuchshuber says. But she admits that they were happily surprised by the willingness of people to engage in a dialogue with them.

"It was very important for us to understand the positions of people who were against declaring sanctuary in our cities," she says. They noted that people were concerned that the declaration would encourage dangerous people to come to Lamorinda. Others said that they had themselves worked hard to get a permit to stay in the U.S. and that they did not see why they would support lawbreakers. The young women add that they also met many sympathizers.

Fuchshuber, Hsu and Shepard were prepared when it came to speaking in front of the city councils. When they came to their first ever council meeting in Orinda, they had divided their presentation into three segments of three minutes each that they gave one after the other. "Diversity and inclusion are fundamental American values," said Hsu in her introduction. "Sanctuary status simply protects the privacy of residents and keeps their immigration status private." Several residents who had heard of their projects also talked in favor of the status. The same happened in Moraga and Lafayette. In Moraga, at least three of the council members clapped with the audience after the presenters talked. Neither council though has yet decided to add the topic on their agenda for future discussion.

Moraga Chief of Police John King assured the council that Moraga would not seek out people's immigration status and that police action was disentangled from immigration enforcement. In Orinda, Chief of Police Mark Nagle stated that his department had not changed its practice in any way since Trump's new orders have been issued. His department is part of the county sheriff's office. Candace Andersen, District 2 County Supervisor, indicated that the practice in Contra Costa County is strictly to collaborate with ICE regarding immigrants in the country illegally who commit serious crimes, but that there was no seeking of those immigrants in the county.

The trio also went to the tri-city meeting on March 1 and the discussion was spirited among those supporting and those opposing the issue.

Three young Lamorinda residents and their friends have decided to take on a highly visible political campaign: get the three communities to declare sanctuary city status.

Sanctuary municipalities are locations where non-U.S. citizens can reside without fear of deportation, if they are law-abiding. There are several such cities in the Bay Area, including Alameda, Oakland San Francisco and Berkeley.

Lynn Hsu, Victoria (Tori) Shepard and Clara Fuchshuber are meeting with civic leaders, business people and talking to city councils, urging them to put the issue of becoming a sanctuary city on the agenda.

The three women are children of immigrant parents. They heard about the sanctuary city movement where jurisdictions declare that within their borders there would be no ethnic profiling against immigrants, and decided this would be their quest: bringing sanctuary status to

Lamorinda Weekly talked to several Lamorinda residents who would rather not be named, and work in surrounding communities where the population of workers that do not have a legal status is large. One who works in a Pleasant Hill school said that some children are scared that their parents will be gone by the time they come home, other students are afraid of just coming outside. Another resident working in the medical field explained that she believes that people are afraid that information collected by social services would be shared with ICE. She said that this month prenatal visits had dropped by 50 percent, but she added that she could not confirm that the scare of being reported was the cause.

Andersen added that the county would not seek sanctuary status because there would be a risk to lose federal funding. A law on the books withholds federal justice department grants to sanctuary cities. It was passed after Kate Steinle was killed in San Francisco two years ago.

The trio adds that there are other ways to make sure that police will not hunt for those in the country illegally, such as reviewing the police rules, or making a statement that would not include the term sanctuary (see the school district's statement below), and they will continue their campaign tailoring it to their communities.

Their next steps are to seek meetings with Lamorinda elected officials to get the topic on the three cities' agenda while garnering as much public support as possible. For those interested, they can be reached at lamorindasanctuary@gmail.com. Their web site Lamorindasanctuary.wordpress.com is under construction.

Near and far: Other "sanctuary" initiatives.

Schools and other cities have adopted rules or ordinances alluding to the safety of students and residents.

Recently, the Acalanes Union High School District boards adopted a resolution ensuring "their unequivocal commitment to ensure our schools are safe and welcoming places for all our students, and that the District will provide equal access to a public education for all our students, regardless of students' or parents' actual or perceived national origin, ethnic group identification, religion, citizenship, or immigration status," its website stated.

The Contra Costa County Board of Education adopted a similar statement at their board meeting on March 1.

At Saint Mary's College students and faculty have asked President James Donahue to make Saint Mary's a sanctuary campus.

Several cities have declared sanctuary status in the Bay Area including Alameda, Berkeley, San Francisco and Oakland.

California Senate Bill 54 ,called the "sanctuary state bill," seeks precluding local and state agencies, such as police departments and ICE, from working in conjunction to seek out immigrants who are undocumented.

Meanwhile, the city of Alameda adopted sanctuary status on Jan. 17, says city manager Jill Keimach, who was Moraga town manager until January 2016.

She explains that when the topic was discussed it was a 50/50 argument with the public, with people saying that the city would harbor criminals. But since Alameda does not have a jail, the argument was mute. ??? Why dos his matter?

Another aspect was funding, she said. On Jan. 25 President Trump signed an executive order denying federal funding to sanctuary cities. Alameda is part of Congresswoman Barbara Lee's district. Lee led a workshop with attorneys to explain to cities that the Tenth Amendment prohibits the federal government from enforcing any law though the denying of funding. The federal government possesses only those powers delegated to it by the United States Constitution, and all remaining powers are reserved for the states or the people. Immigration and deportation are not listed in the Constitution.

Keimach proposed a text to her council that listed all the elements of a sanctuary city, without using the word, something she thought prudent. But Alameda city council decided to use the word "sanctuary." Keimach notes that Alameda has a much larger population of immigrants, documented or not, than Lamorinda, and that these people have been coming to all council meetings. "Anxiety is high," she said.

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