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100 Lafayette Circle after the fire

Photo courtesy ConFire

Total devastation in Lafayette Circle fire

By Nick Marnell

A discarded cigarette on a restaurant patio likely caused the explosion and fire that ripped through the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce building, fire officials said. In minutes the fire wiped out more than 40 years of Lafayette history, completely destroying an iconic restaurant, the Chamber and a number of small businesses.

"We determined that the cause of the fire was accidental," said Robert Marshall, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District fire marshal, a fact of little solace to those who lost everything. As he's done countless times in his 17 years at the restaurant, Jeff Assadi closed La Fines-

tra at 9:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 12 and brought in a company to do after-hours maintenance. Chris Rossi of Siggys Carpet Cleaning of Lafayette shampooed the restaurant carpets, completed the job in an hour and departed. A restaurant employee who assisted Rossi then left, and Assadi locked up the restaurant, noticing nothing at all out of order. "Whatever happened after that, I have no idea," Assadi said.

Whatever happened after that, arrived in a fury from the depths of hell.

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Rescue One marks its 40th year quietly helping to save lives

By Sophie Braccini



Rescue One Foundation members at a demonstration of the new drone that it purchased for MOFD. Seated: MOFD Captain Michael Marquardt (drone pilot), Gene Gottfried, Gordon Nathan; Standing: Linda Borrelli, Ellen Long, Sally Whittaker, Greg Reams, MOFD board president Kathleen Famulener.

Few people know that the Moraga Fire District was the first fire district in Northern California to possess a fully equipped paramedic unit to serve the population's medical emergencies.

It happened because, 40 years ago, Moraga residents were frustrated at not getting

ambulances fast enough. They created Rescue One, the foundation that paid for the very first emergency medical vehicle. Since then Orinda joined the Moraga district that became the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the two towns benefit from the same service.

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Lamorindans react to the EBMUD water rate hike

By Nick Marnell



Residents' EBMUD bills are taking a hike upward.

Photo provided

Proving once again that no good deed goes unpunished, customers of the East Bay Municipal Utility District, who cut water usage nearly 20 percent during the drought, will pay 18.25 percent more for their water over two years through June 2019.

The district board approved the new rates July 11 with a 9.25 percent increase effective immediately, and an additional 9 percent rise next July, much of the \$2 billion raised earmarked for upgrading district infrastructure.

"It's a slap in the face to those who conserved," said EBMUD Ward 2 Director John Coleman, who serves the Lafayette

area and cast the only vote against the rate increase. Coleman prefers that EBMUD had issued general obligation bonds for the infrastructure investment, which he said would have heightened transparency. "We need to be more cognizant of where our citizens are coming from, and my vote reflected that," he said.

Jessica Shafer, a Moraga mother of three, personified Coleman's stance. "It sounds like we did a better job of managing our water than they did managing their money," Shafer said of the district. "Shouldn't we get benefits for working extra hard to save water?"

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It's been 45 years for Roughing It Day-Camp – page B1.



Saint Mary's Mike Matoso wants to continue success as AD – page C1.



Unwanted guests? Get the real buzz on bees in the house – page D1.

