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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. Provided

Jean Kirsch, Jerry Mayer, Linda Borelli and Yvette Nance were some of the founding board members of Rescue One. At the time Borelli was president of the Moraga Service League, and that group was asked if they would raise the money for the first ambulance. Borelli, who has been on Rescue One's board almost continuously since, remembers going door to door asking everyone to chip in \$1 to fund the first vehicle. Rescue One also paid for the training of the first firefighters who volunteered to become paramedics.

When Orinda joined Moraga to form MOFD, Dr. Eugene Gottfried joined Rescue One's board, along with other Orinda residents. He remembers the pre-MOFD time when he needed an ambulance that took 45 minutes to come to his residence and then got lost on its way to the hospital. Gottfried is Rescue One's current president. He explains that the foundation is funded mostly by unsolicited donations from people who were rescued by MOFD ambulances.

Nathan confirms that the group decided not to solicit donations, and he gives the example of the family and friends of Reed Austin Whittaker that made a donation of \$13,000 in memory of the young man who was killed in a tragic automobile accident five years ago. Several organizations also support Rescue One such as the Moraga Country Club, which asks its residents every year if they want to contribute, and Moraga Royale, which raises money for the foundation.

Over the years, the foundation has donated \$417,000 to MOFD. It funded an automated LUCAS chest compression system. Gottfried remembers that about five years ago, just after the LUCAS was purchased, MOFD used it to save the life of a bicyclist who crashed after suffering a heart attack. Money was also used to purchase the first Jaws of Life, a hydraulic apparatus used to open crashed vehicles in order to free people trapped inside, the first a fire district ever owned. MOFD was also the first district to get shoring equipment to allow rescuers to safely attend to people injured in a landslide. The foundation also funded a Zodiac water rescue boat for the San Pablo Reservoir, which is part of MOFD's jurisdiction.

One of the latest donations was used to purchase a drone equipped with infrared cameras that is used in search and rescue missions and is capable of dropping a small first aid kit or miniature AED. The drone was used in the recent Campolindo fire to detect hot spots in the hills. Gottfried noted that MOFD was one of the first agencies to get such a device.

The fire district staff makes requests to the foundation and the board members see if it fits its mission of medical emergency, as well as its budget. The board also wants to support the education of the paramedics. For example Rescue One funded the equipment of an education center within Station 45 in Orinda.

As it marks its 40th anniversary, Rescue One continues to fund equipment and training so medical emergencies are responded to in the two communities with trained professionals equipped with cutting-

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.

Rescue One's roots can be traced back to one day in 1976. Jean Kirsch's husband cut his leg with a power saw and was bleeding profusely. Jean Kirsch called an ambulance while a local Emergency Medical Technician tried to stop the bleeding. The ambulance had to come from Walnut Creek - it took 30 minutes to arrive. Gordon Nathan, a volunteer firefighter and now board member of Rescue One, remembers that Kirsch almost died.

The scare spurred his wife and other residents into action. They decided that they needed a rolling emergency room available locally at all times.

edge, life-saving equipment.

The 40th anniversary will be celebrated all year long. The Town of Moraga honored the foundation at a recent council meeting with a proclamation, Rescue One was in the Fourth of July parade in Orinda, and it is showcasing its history at the MOFD open houses.

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