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Letters to the Editor

On Orinda School Safety

Our highest priorities as Trustees of the Orinda School Board are to provide our students with an excellent education and to keep them safe. Recently, there have been reports of some very disturbing incidents of racial and anti-Semitic bullying on our campuses. We want to emphasize that our school district repudiates bullying of any kind, and we especially condemn racial taunting and teasing. We have been working with the rest of the board to firmly address this issue. Highlights of our work include the following:

- Approving comprehensive student and staff training focused on diversity and inclusiveness at Orinda Intermediate School.

- Training our elementary students with the Think First program.

- Training elementary students, staff, and parents with the Kidpower program.

- Approving a resolution in 2017 condemning displays of hate.

- Adopting Strategic Directions in 2017, which include "Cultivate Ethical and Respectful Citizens who will develop and defend values and viewpoints that respect diversity and inclusion."

As co-chairs of our Student Safety Committee, we will be working this year with both parents and educators to find ways to continue to train teachers, students, and parents to stand up to racism and bullying. Every child deserves an excellent education on a campus where they feel welcomed and safe. Our goal is to provide them nothing less.

Carol Brown and Hillary Weiner
Orinda

In defense of Lafayette city manager

I am commenting on a letter to the editor published Sept. 20 in regard to the City Manager of Lafayette, Steve Falk. To blame and find fault with the City Manager for the actions of the City Council, with which one might disagree, is absurd. Mr. Falk and his staff work for the citizens of Lafayette through policy direction promulgated by the elected, unpaid members of the City Council, who are guided by our General Plan as well as other city, county and state ordinances. In addition, twenty-two citizen commissions and committees, all voluntary, advise the City Council. It is the City Council that directs the activities of the City Manager, and it is the City Council that allocates the funds for the projects and policies it approves. The City Manager does not act alone or in isolation.

Lafayette was one of the first cities to actively pursue an open and transparent city government, in part through the efforts of Mayor Richard Holmes and his brother, Mayor Dr. Gordon Holmes. Lafayette, historically, has been free of Fair Political Practices Commission investigations because its elected officials and salaried staff have sought to keep it that way. Lafayette has an active, open-government policy that covers, among other things, financial transparency forms, salary schedules, and conflict-of-interest disclosures. Documents relating to this policy are available at the City website.

Lafayette is fiscally strong by any measure and has used its tax monies wisely. An excellent example of this is the city-wide upgrade of its roads, drainage systems and public landscaping. A more specific example is the emergency repair to Mountain View Drive during the winter of 2012. The City Council declared an emergency the day after the washout and authorized Mr. Falk to expend necessary dollars out of the reserve fund to make repairs ASAP. Mr. Falk, together with City Engineer Tony Coe and staff, put together a design and found an experienced general engineering contractor who would work 24/7 to complete the repair. The City Staff worked almost around the clock to supervise the installation of a concrete box culvert, proper headwalls, road and drain repairs, all of which were completed in three weeks. Moraga and Orinda have recently had similar washouts. Orinda's repairs took approximately one year, and Moraga is two years into their repair. Steve Falk must be commended for his skillful and quick response to Lafayette's emergency. In this light, I believe Mr. Falk's compensation is fair, reasonable and competitive with city managers in the East Bay.

Lafayette has not lost its moral character. Indeed, it continues on the path laid out by the Holmes brothers. It is transparent; it is inclusive; it is run by its citizens. Mr. Falk is a Lafayette citizen and a very important part of the community. I am grateful for his dedicated service. He is welcomed and highly respected by almost everyone.

Erling Horn
Lafayette

Another side of the city manger story

I write in response to a letter in the Sept. 20 issue, strongly criticizing the work performance of Lafayette's City Manager, Steve Falk. The author states he is offering "a few facts". However, in choosing to present only the negative side of the story, one wonders what is the other agenda? They tell me we live in a democracy, therefore, I write to tell the other side of the story.

Very recently the City of Lafayette received an award recognizing our City as 'A Great Place To Live',

presented by the American Planning Association in Sacramento. Only three cities in CA received this award, the other two being in Southern Calif. The award highlighted good planning, revitalization of the downtown, and protection of natural resources.

Our City Council provides direction and makes decisions for our common good. The City Manager (CM) directs the organization that carries out their decisions. The CM also creates opportunities to advance the quality of our life. Examples include: development and implementation of Downtown Strategic Plan, coordinated the process that resulted in the highly popular, and revenue producing, La Fiesta Square and surrounding retail environment, and partnered with local business owners who have parking on their private property to also allow the public to park during specified times.

When the CM took office in 1996, the downtown corridor was not particularly inviting, offering limited appeal and shopping to residents. Today, our downtown is highly inviting to both residents and visitors, offering a wide variety of attractive retail shopping, restaurants, entertainment, educational and cultural opportunities, and special events.

Every community lives with change. The question is, 'How do you engage and manage change. In our City change is planned with a long view, while observing consistency and historical awareness. And, 'Yes', there are tasks recognized as important, yet not accomplished. And, 'No', I am not a personal friend of our City Manager.

For 30 years, as a volunteer, I maintained our City hiking trails, and designed several trails. My experience says our small paid staff, along with hundreds of volunteers, together work to make Lafayette 'A Great Place To Live'. I have enjoyed the gift of living here for more than 50 years, and for that I am entirely grateful.

Papa John Kiefer
Lafayette

Taking BART riders on a ride

BART has surprised us again with the decision to give free rides as an answer to falling ridership at the weekends. Of all the obvious problems this system has such as overcrowding, dirty trains and stations and lack of security throughout the systems the last thing they need is increased passengers on a free ticket. When will BART officials start to deal with the obvious inconveniences to existing riders who pay significant cost for a ticket but are often subjected to almost inhuman conditions at peak times?

BART's goal should be to provide the Bay Area with a transit system comparable to the systems in major cities throughout the world.

Ann Burns
Lafayette

Art in Moraga

Walking the King's Canyon Loop Trail on a clear, warm Saturday afternoon I was reminded of the elation that proximity to such remarkable natural surroundings can bring. The landscape surrounding my hometown of Moraga lifts me up, inspires me to think in fresh ways, and challenges me to look and listen closely. Art can do that too. It can lift up, inspire fresh thinking, encourage close looking and close listening. I'd like Moraga's Town Council to do more to support the arts and artists in our community, so that our town continues to be enriched by proximity to remarkable natural surroundings and becomes increasingly enlivened by the arts.

The town's Art in Public Spaces program is getting more art into our common areas: sculptures have been placed at the library and at town offices. Local arts supporters can seek out arts-related events at Saint Mary's College and Moraga's public schools and library. More could be done to encourage the arts in town, to further enliven Moraga in ways that support, and not distract from, the important work that needs to be done around issues challenging our civic life.

I like and support the case Mayor Teresa Onoda makes for having a poet laureate for Moraga. It's an idea and a position that speaks clearly to a resident like me who treasures our remarkable surroundings and believes that art can lift up, inspire thinking, and get us to look and listen closely.

Town Council: Can we make finding art in Moraga as unsurprising as finding hills in Moraga?

Layna White
Moraga

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