

# Celebration planned to mark end of the Moraga sinkhole, Nov. 16

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga Public Works Director Edric Kwan with Project Manager Senior Civil Engineer Shawn Knapp in the trench as the culvert is repaired.

Town staff decided to hold the reopening of Rheem Boulevard party on Nov. 16 after all the different pieces are in place, giving the town a finished product: a repaired culvert, a repaved arterial, reconstructed sidewalks, new and cured pavement, new striping and new street lights.

The event will take place from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the corner of Moraga Road and Rheem Boulevard. Just before the official ribbon cutting, emergency vehicles will pass through before the roadway is open to all traffic. The town staff and the Chamber of Commerce are inviting residents and businesses to celebrate the end of the long ordeal, which was delayed by many administrative and meteorological challenges.

Merchants bordering the boulevard will hand out goodies in bags that say, "I survived the sinkhole." Public Works Director Edric Kwan, who has been in charge since the culvert collapsed 20 months ago, says that all the goodies were do-

minated by either utility companies, contractors or local merchants.

Kwan is confident that the demanding process the town was subjected to by the Federal Emergency Management Agency will result in a reimbursement of the close to \$3 million that was spent to repair the hole, but notes that the reimbursement may take years before it returns to the town's reserve fund.

Normal circulation at the intersection will resume soon after the celebration is over.



A worker in the old culvert.

Photos provided

# New winemaker regulations get final planning commission review

By Sophie Braccini

The problem is simple to state: regulating commercial wineries is about balancing the needs of light industrial operations in residential districts with the neighbors' rights and concerns. But it took four hours for the planning commission to reach a consensus, after years of study and outreach, because the questions raised are complex and somewhat ambiguous, according to the commissioners. Throughout the discussion, commissioners questioned the fairness of creating rules that would apply to winemakers only, and would be different from what is asked of other residents or groups.

The neighbors of the few commercial wineries in town have engaged in the regulation process and their concerns center mostly around traffic and parking, noise, and pesticide use. The commission reviewed a proposed regulation addressing only commercial winemakers, not residents making wine for their own use, or grape growing, however large it might be. Staff noted that the vast majority of winemaking and grape growing in town does not fall into the commercial winemaking category. This pertains only to bonded wineries that are licensed with the state. At this time there are only three such operations in town: one on Joseph Drive (the Bluffs), one on Laird Drive and one on Rheem Boulevard. There was also one on Hansen Court, but the new owners indicated that they were not renewing their license.

The winemakers who came to the meeting are part of the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association, the group that went through the long process of having the Lamor-

inda area recognized as a distinct American Viticultural Area. Susan Captain reminded the commissioners that her vineyard was established over 10 years ago with the planning department's blessing, and that the economic development committee had recommended developing winemaking as an opportunity for making the town a destination.

Neighbor Jacques Blumer, however, compared winemaking with tomato canning and tried to explain that this type of industrial activity would never be authorized in Moraga.

On one side, neighbors wanted complete disclosure regarding pesticide use, limits in terms of promotional and large events, no parking impact on public or private roads, and more stringent noise regulation. On the other side, LWGA claimed that the proposed restrictions would kill the budding economic sector, and asked for allowing larger production, not limiting planted acreage, and allowing more events for larger crowds. The planning commission tried to strike a balance.

The question regarding pesticides is a thorny one. Residents claim that spraying is a hazard for

children and adults' health and can have impacts on the watershed. They asked for disclosure, testing and possibly restriction to only organic products. Staff was clear that the matter is a privilege of the state and cannot be further regulated by cities. There were only two ways that were found compatible with the state rules to control pesticide use at the city level: ask winemakers to send the town a copy of the pesticide report they have to submit to the district, and require setbacks to limit impacts on neighbors.

Commissioner Karl Davis gave his personal testimonial from when he lived in Guerneville, next to a large wine grower, and said that a 50-foot setback made a difference. He qualified his remarks by saying they were anecdotal and not scientific proofs of the benefit of such a setback. His fellow commissioners asked that staff researched the efficacy of setbacks on neighboring pollution before bringing the text to the town council. Davis also noted the ambiguity of the proposed text that would regulate the spraying for winemakers, but not for wine growers who can just as easily impact their neighbors.

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