

LAMORINDA WEEKLY



925-377-0977

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Christmas Eve Services

Sunday, December 24

Morning Service: 10:00 a.m.

Family Services: 3:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Traditional Services: 7:00 p.m. & 8:30 p.m.

Candlelight Communion Service (New!): 11:00 p.m.

New Year's Eve Services

Sunday, December 31

Sunday Morning Services: 9:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

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Free horse-drawn carriage rides were a highlight of this annual event on Dec. 9.

Photo Sora O'Doherty

'Holiday Magic' delights locals in Orinda's downtown

By Sora O'Doherty

It was a quiet but bright holiday night on Dec. 9 for the "Holiday Magic at Orinda Theatre Square" event. Locals lined up to patiently wait for free rides on an elegant old-fashioned horse-drawn carriage, complete with bright carriage lantern and Christmas lights, which did a lazy loop of Moraga Way from Theatre Square to Northwood Drive and

around the roundabout at Bryant Way. Traffic slid by with quiet respect, engines barely audible in the brisk evening air. Along Moraga Way, families wandered, checking out the menus in the brightly decorated restaurants, deciding where to enjoy their evening meal. Inside Theatre Square, there was a gentle buzz as families walked about, meeting live cartoon

characters for a chat and a photo. A vivid red furry Elmo from Sesame Street delighted the little ones, along with bright blue Chase from Paw Patrol. None of the children, who were grinning ear to ear, seemed frightened by the life-sized characters that enthusiastically posed for photos.

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Eye-opening Lafayette Police Community Forum on ID theft and fraud

By B. B. Kaye

Lafayette Police Chief Eric Christensen shared important tips on how to avoid the latest identity theft and fraud scams before a large turnout Dec. 6 at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Center.

Christensen said that identity theft is a crime anyone can easily fall prey to, calling it a relatively low-risk endeavor. Bank robberies average less than \$2,000, the odds of being caught are extremely high, and jail time for such offenses is very long. But identity theft is considered to be a "victimless" crime, so jail time is low, and the average take for a single such fraud is \$5,000. In 2016, one out of every 16 Americans reported some kind of identity theft, and losses amounted to \$16 billion. In California alone, four million people fell victim to ID theft.

The chief named tax fraud the No. 1 type

of ID theft, cautioning that if you get multiple return statements or paystubs from employers you don't know, or you are told by tax agencies that you have already received the refund you were waiting for, your information may be stolen. "It's hard to get through that phone-tree," Christensen said. "Usually an hour-and-a-half to two hours, but they'll fix it for you. Make sure you write down the name of everyone you talk to. And come to us! Reporting it is very important."

The most frequent way that people lose a credit card or other valuables is by leaving them in a car. Thieves go "rooting" from car-to-car to see which one is unlocked and if something entices they may even break a window to steal it. This year, one Lafayette resident lost \$25,000 in cash by leaving it in his car.

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A town on the brink

By Nick Marnell

Despite its declaration of a fiscal emergency, the town of Moraga has made little effort to reign in its spending and at its current rate is headed toward financial unsustainability.

In a 2016 Community Priorities survey commissioned by the town, Moraga residents said that not maintaining storm drains was their second highest source of dissatisfaction with town performance, behind attracting and keeping local businesses. A follow-up survey asked residents how much they would be willing to pay to fund the \$26 million the town says it needs to repair the drains. Not one of the survey options was to have Moraga reduce its spending to help fund the capital project.

"The survey was conducted as a council goal to identify a possible revenue measure. That is what was done," said City Manager Bob Priebe. "There has been no opportunity to allocate any dedicated funding to the storm drain deficiency."

So the town, having declared a fiscal emergency after unforeseen expenditures to repair the Rheem Boulevard sinkhole and the Canyon bridge, is considering asking taxpayers for more money to fund the storm drain project, even though Moraga, knowing that the storm drain repair was a necessary capital project, has not only failed to set aside any of its revenue to fund the project

but continues to pile on more operating expenses each year.

According to the town 2017-18 operating budget, after making adjustments for reallocated Measure K revenue, Moraga total revenue – general fund revenue plus other financing sources – will have increased 20.7 percent in 2017-18 from five years ago, and general fund operating expenses will have jumped 22 percent over the same five years, an unsustainable financial performance.

The Moraga audit and finance committee does not see it that way. "The town manages its expenses extremely carefully and very well," said Tim Freeman, a member of the committee, which reviewed the proposed 2017-18 budget at its May 16 meeting.

The town's No. 1 general fund revenue source is property tax. In its 2014 five-year financial plan Moraga projected total property tax revenue of \$13.2 million for four years between 2015-18. Updated in the recently approved town budget, property tax revenue will have finished at \$14.8 million through the same period. None of the \$1.6 million windfall was set aside for the storm drain project. Priebe said that any budget surplus since 2016-17 had to be returned to a developer account; the projected surplus for this fiscal year is less than \$50,000.

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A Note About Our Newspaper Carrier

Blackhawk Enterprise (email –mailblackhawk@gmail.com) has been delivering the Lamorinda Weekly to all homes in Orinda, Lafayette and Moraga since January 2011. The team of eight drivers works hard to make sure you get your newspaper every other Wednesday. Blackhawk Enterprise and its team members would like to wish our readers a joyous holiday season and a very happy new year. You will also see a flyer from them in this week's issue.

Thank you, Lamorinda Weekly

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Orinda City Council amends Moraga Adobe land use – page A6

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Another Fire Station 43 setback – page A8

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One home's over-the-top rooftop decor – page D1.

