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Competitive MOFD board races shaping up

By Nick Marnell

Two last-minute incumbent withdrawals and the addition of last-minute challengers in three divisions add intrigue to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board races for the November general election.

President and Division 4 director Brad Barber explained his withdrawal from the race in an Aug. 14 announcement. "My decision not to run for re-election to the MOFD board was based on a number of factors, the most important of which is that I was asked by Marc Andrus, the Episcopal Bishop of California, to serve as Treasurer of the Diocese of California for the next two years," Barber said. In addition, Barber serves on five boards at UC Berkeley and is a regent of Samuel Merritt University in Oakland.

"Perhaps most importantly, my wife would like me to cut back," he said.

Barber said that the board has made significant, if incremental, progress in his tenure on the board, mainly in the financial sustainability of the district. He wished more progress had been made in improving the comparatively slower emergency medical response times in Orinda. "That is a complex problem but it should not be an insoluble one," he said.

The district's first and only female director, Kathleen Famulener, withdrew her candidacy in Division 1, saying that it was time for her to retire. She, too, cited financial accomplishments during her five-year tenure, including the lowering of the district pension debt by \$12 million, setting aside money in pension and retiree health care trust funds and nearing the payoff of the district pension obligation bond.

"It's time to pass the mantle to the next generation," Famulener said.

In her division, the race will feature Moraga businessman Nate Bell versus Greg Baitx, an East Contra Costa Fire Protection District engineer.

"I live on the edge of open space, and with wildfires that will undoubtedly continue, I am very concerned," said Bell, who believes strongly in citizen involvement in government and that it is needed now more than ever. "I want to ensure the highest level of fire and medical service for the community," Baitx said.

Two candidates vie for Barber's Orinda Division 4 seat. Michael Donner, a retired Oakland firefighter and current business owner, will oppose Lucy Talbot, a community volunteer and co-owner of a family business. "I want to get involved at the next level," said Talbot, who feels strongly that MOFD needs to allocate more of its resources to fire prevention, and needs to improve response times especially for medical emergencies, which far outnumber fire responses.

The Division 3 incumbent confirmed that he is not going away. Steve Anderson will face two challengers, including retired Oakland Fire Department administrator Steve Danziger and Red Smith, a technology executive. Division 3 includes portions of Moraga and Orinda, but all three candidates live in Orinda. The seven candidates will have a chance to explain their positions in detail in the Oct. 17 issue of this newspaper.

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