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MOFD welcomes Truck 44 into its apparatus fleet

By Nick Marnell



From left, firefighter-paramedic Jeremy Kshevatzky, Capt. Brad Nygard and engineer Clayton Hoover. Photo Nick Marnell

That head-turning, bright red, articulated fire truck that has been on training runs in Moraga and Orinda streets for the past few weeks was put into service Sept. 10 at Moraga-Orinda Fire District Station 44. The \$1.2 million truck is part of a major apparatus purchase approved by the district board in 2017.

The new vehicle is indeed a showstopper. "We've been getting a lot of comments from the public and from other agencies about how beautiful this truck is," Capt. Brad Nygard said.

But the truck has not arrived without controversy. Two district board members voted against its purchase, with director John Jex wary that the district was not in a solid enough financial position to spend nearly \$3 million on new apparatus. Others argued that a quint - a vehicle that carries an aerial ladder, a ground ladder, a pump, water and a hose - would have been a more prudent purchase.

A quint operates both as a fire truck and a fire engine but according to many firefighters, does neither operation well. "I know what an engine can do and I know what a truck can do," Capt. Daryle Balao, one of the original MOFD firefighters, said at the time. "My responsibility as a truck captain is to open holes and break things so that the engine company can put the fire out." A ladder truck carries extrication equipment and specialized rescue supplies. It carries more tools than an engine but no water. Its 100-foot aerial ladder is bigger. Its features are more in line with current firefighting needs, said Balao.

The Spirit of Saint Mary's, the truck donated to MOFD by the college in 2001, became a reserve vehicle at Station 41 once the new truck was put into front line service at Fire Station 44. That change also caused controversy, with Moraga residents complaining about the district moving the truck to Orinda.

"I make no decisions based on politics of the district," said Fire Chief Dave Winacker. The chief stressed the central location of Station 44, noting that the travel time from the station is almost identical to both Orinda Village and Saint Mary's College.

As for accessibility, Winacker said that Truck 41 was unable to access 170 streets and courts and an additional 21 portions of various streets and courts in the district. Because of the increased mobility of its articulating chasis, Truck 44 will be able to access all but six streets and courts. That list excludes areas that MOFD does not respond with a truck, such as Canyon, Bollinger, and other outlying areas. In those areas, road access is not the issue, but the rural nature of the community with the associated vegetation and property setbacks makes a truck ineffective, and Winacker said the district responds with an engine instead.

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