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New MOFD board defies tradition, elects Danziger president

By Nick Marnell



The three newly elected, union-supported members of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District governing board made an immediate impact Dec. 5 by shattering tradition and electing newcomer Steven Danziger as president of the district board of directors.

A stunned silence followed director Michael Donner's motion to nominate Danziger, and when Room No. 7 of the Orinda Community Center sprung back to life, speakers bashed the action as dangerous and irresponsible. One member of the public stoked the fears and the rhetoric that suffused the November election campaigns. "I find it disturbing," he said. "I'm concerned with the idea that the union is taking over the board and taking over the fire district."

New MOFD board, from left: Michael Donner, Craig Jorgens, Steven Danziger and Greg Baitx. Missing: John Jex Photo Nick Marnell Possibly sensing a runaway train heading his way, Local 1230 President Vince Wells attempted to quell the uprising. "I don't want this election to be the union versus other candidates," Wells said. "Decisions should

not be made based on who supported which candidates. I would hope that no members of the board - including the ones we supported - will operate from that platform."

The MOFD board elects officers at the end of every year, and traditionally, though not a district bylaw, the vice president is elected president for the succeeding year. There have been exceptions, as when former director Alex Evans turned down his nomination for president in 2014, citing an extremely heavy workload at his market research firm during an election year. Had precedent been followed, the 2019 board president would be John Jex.

"There are good reasons for tradition," cautioned one speaker. "Learn how all of this works before taking on a leadership role." The rotation of the role as president is a politically neutral mechanism, offered another speaker, stressing that with everyone given a chance to be president, contention is avoided.

Kymberleigh Korpus, Moraga town council member and MOFD liaison, agreed on the likelihood of contention. She warned that when traditions were not followed in Moraga, divisiveness and anger among town council members soon followed.

So why did Donner, a retired Oakland firefighter well versed in the nuances of the fire service, break with tradition and nominate Danziger? "Fire is steeped in tradition, and I normally honor that," Donner said. "With Steve, I made an exception. We worked together in Oakland for 20 years, and I know how well he comports himself. He is very composed, and he will be a great leader."

Despite a final plea by director Craig Jorgens to honor tradition, the board elected Danziger president by a 3-2 vote, with Jex and Jorgens voting no and Greg Baitx joining Donner and Danziger, the three union-supported directors, to vote yes.

In 2018, through November, the MOFD board voted on 28 agendized items and split only five times. The cohesiveness of the new board will be a development to watch closely throughout 2019.

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