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Refurbished vintage Beetle finds new home in Lafayette

Submitted by Thomas Black



Surrounded by members of Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary, Steve Falk and wife Nancy pose outside Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa with the vintage Beetle they won in a public raffle conducted by the club. Of 1,500 tickets sold, Falk bought six for \$100. As restored, the car is valued upward of \$20,000. It sold new in the U.S. for less than \$1,700. Photos provided

With only two days left before retiring as longtime city manager of Lafayette, Steven Falk received a surprise farewell gift. It came neither from the city nor his co-workers, but from Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club.

Smiling ear to ear, Falk was handed the keys to a 1961 VW Beetle. In less than a year, members of Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club had refurbished it from bumper to bumper. Why the smile? It was he who had purchased the lucky raffle ticket, which was plucked from a rented cylindrical drum at the city's holiday tree-lighting ceremony at Plaza Park.

Once the name of the winner was announced, wags immediately asked whether the raffle was rigged. "Absolutely not," insisted Chris Laszcz-Davis, who is club president. Skies darkened, a flashlight was needed to read the ticket she held aloft after reaching into the drum. Falk was elsewhere as his name was read aloud.

Falk did allow that his chances were improved by having purchased six tickets at a cost of \$100. An extraordinary bargain for a "pre-loved" classic car, which on the open market likely would fetch upward of \$20,000. All told, some 1,500 ducats were sold.

Standing beside his new/old prize and with 30-some club members assembled for a posterity picture, Falk was formally presented the keys outside the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa, where Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary meets Friday mornings at 7 a.m.

Falk commented that the reincarnated Beetle joins two other, newer, VW products already in the family fleet, where at least "for now," he said, the prize will remain.

Why the public raffle of the car? It became the club's principal fundraiser for 2018. It was purchased in as-is condition - not exactly "mint" - by Rotarian Hays Englehart from a private party in Southern California and donated by Englehart to the club. An avid gearhead, Englehart offered his well-outfitted home garage, which features a fancy power lift, to put the car back into running condition. Extensive mechanical repairs were necessary.

Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary has gained recognition as the club that "builds stuff" to raffle as fundraisers. Previous hands-on projects include constructing two canoes and a teardrop trailer, all from scratch. Combined, the trio netted \$50,000 in revenue.

Proceeds are always plowed back into the community. Service projects include ongoing sponsorship of Contra Costa County Interfaith Housing and of the annual Three-Quarter Century Luncheon to honor Orinda residents aged 75 and up; Family Harvest Farm, a not-for-profit urban farm and culinary garden for transitioning foster youth; Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano; summer leadership camps for high-schoolers; STEM-related programs for middle-schoolers; restoration of San Pablo Creek; Lafayette Youth Arts Society; and HOME Team, which provides gratis home repairs to seniors. In addition, last fall the club dispatched a team of member volunteers to aid in building a house for indigent natives in Guatemala.

In the pipeline is an ambitious watercraft rehab project involving a 1963 Glasspar runabout motorboat that belongs to another club member, Gary Fulcher. It is in his killer home woodshop in Lafayette that both boats and the trailer were crafted. The motorboat is targeted for public unveiling later this year.



Hays Englehart, Beetle rehab project leader, powerwashes front bay, from which spare tire had been removed. All of the mechanical-repair work was done at his home in Moraga.

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