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Fire prevention rises toward celebrity status at MOFD

By *Nick Marnell*

To bolster its fire prevention efforts, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District bumped its fuels mitigation manager position from seasonal to year-round, increased the number of fire prevention aides from six to nine and plans to add a full-time administrator to support expanded fire prevention efforts. These actions are in addition to the state-funded North Orinda Shaded Fuel Break project, which commences in mid-July and will be supervised by a project manager and the district Emergency Preparedness Coordinator.

Based on public demand, the MOFD board directed Fire Chief Dave Winnacker to shift \$150,000 from a contingency fund in the 2019-20 district budget into the fire prevention division. The major benefactor becomes the district fuels mitigation program, which increases from a six-month to a year-round program, and now includes funding for one full-time, year-round fuels mitigation manager and two seasonal, part-time fuels mitigation and outreach crews. These three-person crews will continue to operate the district wood chipper program, which is already booked through August.

Because of the added fire prevention efforts, the district will replace one part-time district aide position with the full-time administrator, who will support the fire prevention division. That job should open later this summer. The fuels mitigation manager position has been posted, along with that of the district fire marshal, as Fire Marshal Kathy Leonard retired in early July after 10 years with MOFD.

The district brought on retired Alameda County Fire Department Deputy Chief Jim Call to supervise the North Orinda Shaded Fuel Break program, a \$4 million state funded project to remove problem vegetation along a 14-mile stretch running along north Orinda and western Lafayette. Dennis Rein, the MOFD Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, will see his hours increase through the duration of the project as he helps Call supervise the program.

MOFD also promoted engineer and 10-year veteran Jacob Airola to captain June 6. Airola replaces Steve Gehling, who moved up to battalion chief in April. "I have been very fortunate to have great mentors throughout my career," Airola said. "I'm excited for the opportunity to work in a new capacity in this community."

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