

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 13 Issue 15 Wednesday, September 18, 2019



Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

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Mighty oak comes crashing down



Photos Robert J. Schroeder Photography

By Jennifer Wake

Bob and Sue Miller have had a magnificent Valley oak tree in their Lafayette backyard to enjoy since their house was built in 1954. “It stood close to 100 feet high, was beautifully symmetrical and was estimated by arborists to be from 500-800 years old,” Sue Miller exclaimed.

The tree was affectionately known as Odin, the German god of war.

Over Labor Day weekend half the tree fell, followed less than a week later by the

other half. “Fortunately no one was hurt,” Miller said. “It’s obvious from the exposed roots that it had extensive root rot.”

According to Dan Dauchauer, a certified arborist with Tree Sculpture in Orinda, the tree appeared to fail because of decay and weak trunk attachments that became vulnerable because the decay was weakening their structural strength. “Valley oaks are very drought tolerant and like a dry climate during the dry season. The best advice I can give is have your trees assessed by an arborist on a regular basis. Arborists

are trained to identify trees under stress and many times they will be able to alert a resident to a problem.”

Dauchauer says there are two different types of arborists: consulting arborists and tree care arborists. “Often times tree assessments overlap between the two different types, but generally speaking a consulting arborist can help guide a resident to what their trees need and through their recommendations, a tree care arborist affiliated with a tree care company can do the work,” he said.

The tree in question had decay and a consulting arborist would have been able to perform a risk assessment on the tree and then determine if the tree needed to be pruned, cabled for stability or removed, Dauchauer said.

“Our message to everyone is to please be conscientious about the health of your large trees and see that they get proper care,” Miller said. “Had this tree come down in another direction it might have been catastrophic.”

