

Peer support team helps firefighters cope with stresses of the job

By Nick Marnell

Acknowledging that a cultural shift is necessary, and encouraged by the firefighters union, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District has instituted a peer support group to help suppression personnel deal with the unique struggles and traumas they experience on the job.

"Firefighters are human and not immune to things they see in their career," said Anthony Stephens, MOFD firefighter and executive vice president of United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County, Local 1230. Firefighters deal with potential life endangering emergency calls daily, and witness things that a local firefighter once said "people should never see." The peer support

program is a concerted effort on the part of the membership to look out for one another.

Stephens said that in addition to taking care of each other on the local level, the aim of the support program is to eliminate the stigma of asking for help in the first place. "I've seen progress in the nature of social acceptability. Firefighters are excited that these programs now exist," Stephens said. "But it takes time."

Capt. Jon Bensley is the peer support team coordinator for MOFD. "I too have got to change the stigma that I've grown up with in the fire service," he said. "Define and identify the problem and see what resources are available to ourselves, and how self-care can help us not carry the problems home with us."

Sometimes to tragic levels. According to a study conducted by the Ruderman Family Foundation, a philanthropic organization that fights for the rights of people with disabilities, 103 firefighters nationwide died by suicide in 2017, compared to 93 firefighter line-of-duty deaths.

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District has had its Critical Incident Stress Management program in place for five years, and Contra Fire group coordinator Chris Hummel, also a member of the Local 1230 executive board, is helping MOFD implement its own program. "We do a great job of helping strangers but a poor job of taking care of ourselves," Hummel said.

After a particularly emotionally wrought incident,

such as a pediatric death, or a long, one-on-one victim interaction that ends in death, Hummel said that the membership knows to expect a call from the peer support group. "It's easier to talk to a person who has experienced a similar situation," Stephens said. And though the peer support team can provide critical stress reduction, and immediate decompression, Stephens emphasized that the team role does not supersede the work of a professional therapist.

Slowly, the stigma of dealing with emotional injuries in the fire service is disappearing. On Oct. 1, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1116, which establishes statewide standards for local and regional peer support and crisis referral programs for firefighters. The

bill provides for a network of available peers who can discuss emotional or professional issues, including substance abuse, grief support and workplace issues.

"We're ahead of the game," Hummel said.

The CISM program has the total support of Fire Chief Dave Winnacker. "MOFD is proud to partner with Local 1230 to develop a peer support network. We ask our firefighters to respond to difficult situations in our time of need and this is one of the ways we can build their resiliency to help them deal with the long-term effects of repeated exposures over the length of their career."

"This generation is ready for it," Bensley said.

Fire and fury experienced in Lamorinda



Orinda PSPS Resource Center



Empty parking lot at La Fiesta Square in Lafayette

Photo John Fernbacher

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"The firefighters were waiting for it when it got there. There was a fire engine in practically every driveway," Rein said.

Rein praised the residents, who evacuated in the middle of the night despite no electric power, and headed to an evacuation center at St. Monica Church, which also had no power. "No whimpering or whining from anyone," Rein said.

By 7:30 that morning, most of the residents were back in their homes, except for the homes on Merrill, where fire engines remained to ensure containment, which occurred at 11:15 a.m.

No injuries were reported, no structures were damaged and the college was not threatened. Though the fire remains under investigation, Rein said that the fire was definitely not caused by PG&E power lines, as the lines are underground in that area, and the utility had cut off power to Moraga earlier that evening as part of its PPS program.

Communication regarding

the PG&E outages had begun earlier in the week, with the initial information stating power shutoffs would begin at midnight on Oct. 9, causing some city offices to close, council meetings to be canceled, and local churches and schools to cancel community events. Mauro Cazarez, owner of Baja Cali in Orinda, said that he was closed on Oct. 9 because he was told there would be no power at midnight, then at noon that day. If he cooked, he would not have been able to serve lunch, he said. The restaurant was closed with no power on Oct. 10. Cazarez said he was trying to transfer some food to his father's restaurant in Hercules because he was told by his insurance company that he would not be reimbursed for food loss since he "had notice." He said he could possibly get something for loss of business, but he wasn't sure of that.

Many local residents heeded the call on Oct. 8 to fill gas tanks, causing long lines as folks queued up for gas at the Chevron station on Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Lines at the Moraga Safeway for ice were long

as well, as customers purchased supplies due to information from PG&E stating that the potential outage could last from two to five days. Three refrigeration trucks were parked outside Whole Foods Market in Lafayette Oct. 10 to keep food from spoiling, and generators were used to keep doors open at the Lafayette Trader Joe's and Diablo Foods.

The city of Orinda operated a PPS Resources Center, where citizens could power their devices, stay cool, and avail of hot and cold drinks. Cindy Powell of the Orinda Association provided a microwave oven so that people could heat up food. City of Orinda Facilities and Parks Supervisor Steve Ehrhardt was happy that The Guzzler was on site Thursday evening for the food truck event. John Holtzer of Steel Smokin BBQ food truck

said they didn't have a problem with power because they run on a generator; however, without internet, they could not accept credit card payments.

Lafayette resident Marilyn Finn, 81, cooked meat from her freezer, and returned it to freeze, and made plans to ensure her food did not spoil once the power went out. Since she is hard of hearing and uses a CPAP machine at night to treat sleep apnea, she was frustrated with the confusing information coming from PG&E since she needs electricity to operate the machine as well as devices designed to help alert her in emergencies due to her hearing loss. Her frustration was shared by many other Lamorinda residents, who vociferously expressed their displeasure with PG&E on social me-

dia prior to the shutdown. Lafayette City Council Member Cam Burks said in an Oct. 11 social media post that his "primary concern over these past few days has been the public safety of our community. Lafayette Police and city staff/leadership have done a superb job. However, Pacific Gas and Electric Company negligence has cost our city major tax dollars, placing our residents at risk, and impacting our public education, transportation systems and local businesses."

Gov. Gavin Newsom blasted PG&E for the planned outage, saying at an Oct. 10 press conference, "What has occurred in the last 48 hours is due to decades of neglect. We should not accept the false choice between public safety and hardship." He made sure to compliment Cal Fire and local fire agencies, noting that the Moraga fire benefited from prepositioning of assets.

PG&E President and CEO Bill Johnson, when asked at a subsequent press conference if this is the new normal, said, "The goal is to reduce wildfire risks and prevent catastrophic events like we had in the past two years." In the days before the planned outage, PG&E call centers were overwhelmed and its website crashed. "We were not adequately prepared for this event," Johnson noted, "and this needs to improve in the future."

Finn said she plans to sign up for Nixle (nixle.com), which provides information from local public safety departments about important events.

Fire District Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District
Board of Directors
Wednesday, Oct. 16, 7 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas.
Visit www.mofd.org



ConFire

Board of Directors
Tuesday, Nov. 12, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber Room 107,
Administration Building
651 Pine St., Martinez.
For meeting times and agendas, visit www.cccfpd.org



Public Safety

Emergency response:

Emergency: 24 Hours 911
Police Dispatch: 24 Hours
925-284-5010

Nixle: Text your zip code to 888777 or go to www.nixle.com

Lafayette Police Department:

3471 Mt. Diablo Blvd.
925-283-3680
Chief of Police, Ben Alldritt
925-299-3221

Police Department Tip Line

94549Tip@gmail.com
Police Department Traffic Issues
94549Traffic@gmail.com

Moraga Police Department:

329 Rheem Blvd., 925-888-7055
Chief of Police, Jon King ext. 7049

Orinda Police Department:

22 Orinda Way 925-254-6820
Chief of Police, David M. Cook
925-254-6820
Orindatip@cityoforinda.org

Lafayette Police Department Incident Summary Report

Sept. 22 - Oct. 5

Alarms 29
911 Calls (includes hang-ups) 9
Traffic 84
Suspicious Circumstances 0
Suspicious Subject 22
Suspicious Vehicle 14



Service to Citizen 25
Patrol Req./Security Check 14
School Assembly Check 5
Vacation House Check 1
Supplemental Report 12
Welfare Check 8

Vehicle violations

Auto Burglary
1200 Block Pleasant Hill Rd. (2)
3300 Block Springhill Rd.
Carol Ln./Mt. Diablo Blvd. (2)
Hit And Run Misdemeanor
900 Block Acalanes Rd. (3)
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Petty Theft From Veh
3200 Block Elvia St.
Reckless Driving
Moraga Rd./Moraga Blvd.
Olympic Blvd./Pleasant Hill Rd.
Happy Valley Rd./Rose Ln.
Tc - Property Damage
Pleasant Hill Rd./Greenvalley Dr.

Other criminal activity

Commercial Burglary
3300 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
3300 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Fraud False Pretenses
3600 Block Madrone Dr.
20 Block Sanford Ln.
3100 Block Somerset Dr. (2)
Identity Theft
Police Department (3)
Misc Burglary
900 Block Condit Ct.
Panhandling
Mt. Diablo Blvd./Moraga Rd.
Petty Theft
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
3300 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
900 Block Hawthorn Dr.
1400 Block Rancho View Dr.
1100 Block Camino Vallecito
Petty Theft Other
1100 Block Garden Ln.

Shoplift
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Threats

3600 Block Brook St.

Nuisance to the Community

Disturbance-domestic
Stanley Blvd./Pleasant Hill Rd.
Laurel Dr./Deer Hill Rd.
Disturbing The Peace
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Sessions Rd./Northridge Ln.
900 Block Almanor Ln.
Drunk In Public
1000 Block Oak Hill Rd., Lap
Loud Music
3300 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Loud Noise
3200 Block Acalanes Av
3300 Block Springhill Rd.
1200 Block Pleasant Hill Rd.
Loud Party
Kincheloe Ct./Reliez Valley Rd.
Moraga Rd./Rowe Pl.
Public Nuisance
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
1000 Block 2nd St.
Solana Dr./Hamlin Rd.

Other

Accident Property
1st Street/Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Ordinance Violation
1000 Block Dewing Ave.
Hilltop Dr./Hastings Ct.
Public Assembly Check
3400 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
1200 Block Pleasant Hill Rd.
Trespass
800 Block Broadmoor Ct.
3000 Block Brohrer Dr.
Unwanted Guest
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Violation Custody Order
Police Department
Police Department

Moraga Police Department Incident Summary Report

Sept. 24 - Oct. 7

Alarms 15
911 Calls (includes hang-ups) 12
Traffic 47
Suspicious Circumstances 16
Suspicious Subject 5
Suspicious Vehicle 7
Service to Citizen 48
Patrol Req./Security Check 21
Supplemental Report 11
Welfare Check 4

Vehicle violations

Excessive Speed
Moraga Commons
Moraga Way/Ivy Dr.
St. Andrews Dr./Moraga Way
Moraga Rd./Donald Dr.
Canyon Rd./Country Club Dr.
Rheem Blvd./Chalda Way (2)
Rheem Blvd./Moraga Rd. (3)
St. Marys College
Corliss Dr./Woodside Dr.
Reckless Driving
St. Marys Rd./Rheem Blvd.
Tc - Property Damage
2100 Block Ascot Dr.
Other criminal activity
Fraud False Pretenses
1000 Block Country Club Dr.
Identity Theft
Police Department
Police Department
300 Block Birchwood Dr.
Petty Theft
Starbucks
Moraga Way/Moraga Rd.
Rape
Campolindo High School



Warrant Arrest

Moraga Way/Camino Ricardo

Nuisance to the Community

Loud Music
Moraga Royale Retirement Home
School St./Country Club Dr.
Canyon Club Brewery
Hacienda
1500 Block Canyon Rd.
Donald Dr./Moraga Rd. (2)
Loud Noise
800 Block Camino Ricardo
Loud Party
2000 Block Ascot Dr. (3)
Phone Harass
1900 Block St. Marys Rd.
Public Nuisance
10 Block Camelford Ct.

Other

Battery
20 Block Birchwood Pl.
Harassment
St. Marys College
10 Block Camelford Ct.
Mentally Ill Commit
Campolindo High School
Public Assembly Check
Rheem Valley Shopping Center
Safeway
Violation Restraining Order
1900 Block St. Marys Rd.



Orinda Police Department Incident Summary Report will be back next time