

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

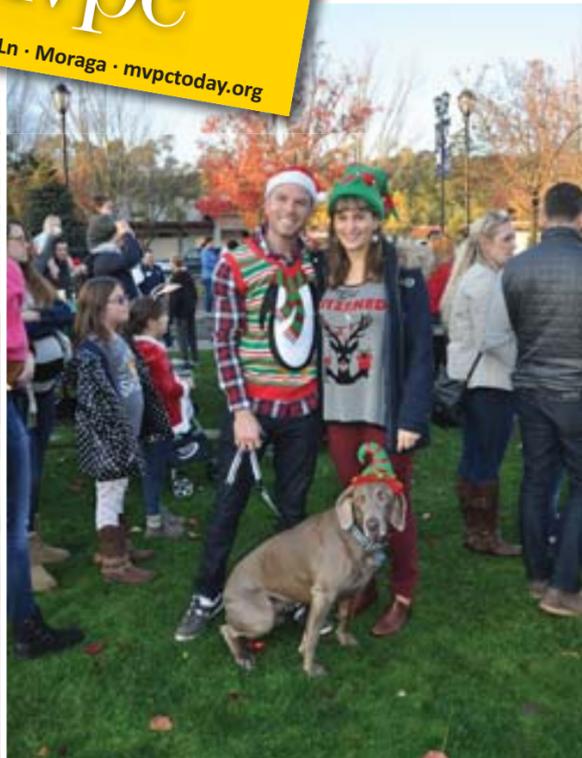
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Christmas Eve Services
December 24
5 pm Family Service
9 pm Candlelight Service
 Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church
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Photos Sora O'Doherty and Andy Schreck

A weekend of Holiday celebrations. Anna and Olaf came to Orinda Theatre Square and performers including Lafayette Kid's Cottage entertained at Lafayette Plaza Park.

Lamorinda rings in the holiday season

The holidays are in full swing, with events over the past weekend showcasing the wonder of the season – especially for the littler Lamorinda residents on Dec. 8 who enjoyed close encounters with beloved characters like Anna and Olaf from the popular “Frozen” movie series for photo opportunities at Orinda’s Theatre Square and jolly interactions with Santa at the “It’s a Wonderful Life” event in Lafayette.

Tons of toddlers and parents filled Lafayette’s Plaza Park, enjoying pizza by the slice, hot cocoa and wine for the adults as they listened to performances by members of the Lafayette Nursery School, Lafayette Kid’s Cottage and many others. Lafayette residents Dean Powell and Holly Jackson brought their 5-year-old puppy, Scrabble, to the event and he loved all the excitement and posing for photos. One of the sponsors, Lafayette realtor

Dana Green, said she was happy that organizers decided to move the date to Sunday, noting how more families were able to enjoy the festivities together and visit with “the big guy” since the event wasn’t held on a work day.

Two more opportunities to visit with Santa in Lamorinda will be happening Dec. 14 and 15.

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Home invasion arrests made the day after Lafayette public safety meeting



Photo Jeff Heyman, city of Lafayette

Attendees at the Dec. 4 Public Safety Committee special meeting in Lafayette.

By Nick Marnell

To help allay the concerns and fears of Lafayette residents after an unusual spike in crime in the city this fall, Lafayette council members Cam Burks and Steven Bliss called a special meeting of the city public safety committee Dec. 4 at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Center. A standing room crowd of more than 100 heard Police Chief Ben Alldritt explain what the city is doing to protect residents after two recent home invasion robberies and an overall increase in residential robberies since October.

... continued on Page A3

A Note About Our Newspaper Carrier



Blackhawk Enterprise has been delivering the Lamorinda Weekly to all homes and businesses since Jan. 2011.

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Thank you, Lamorinda Weekly



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MOFD settles civil complaint – Page A8

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Campo girls and boys cross country champs - Page C1



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See public meetings schedule on this pages and check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements

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 Phone: (925) 284-1968
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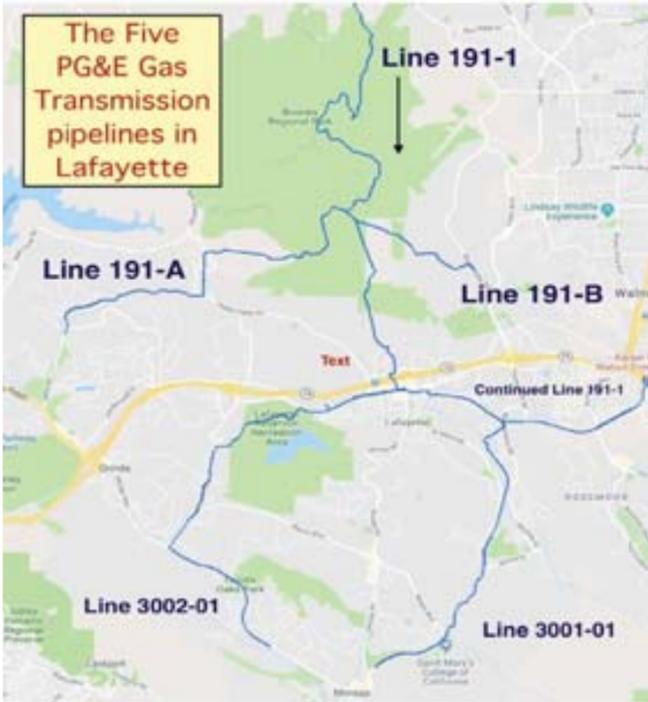
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Work resumes on regulator expansion in Lafayette, anomaly in pipe addressed



Lafayette's five PG&E high-pressure natural gas transmission lines

By Jennifer Wake

Pacific Gas and Electric Company resumed work to clear nearly 30 additional trees as part of the regulator station expansion on property at the intersection of Reliez Station Road and Andreasen Drive after a judge denied a request for a temporary restraining order by the Andreasen Drive Homeowners Association Dec. 2 for PG&E to halt work at the site.

According to Andreasen Drive Homeowners Association President Aron Rosenberg, the HOA had provided PG&E with

a list of "non-negotiable" requests concerning a second emergency egress, construction of a wall matching that of the neighboring Olympic Oaks development, and holding off on removal of the additional 28 trees at the site.

PG&E purchased the adjacent property in order to expand and upgrade the regulator station, which involves removing the old regulator station, building a new regulator station, installing automated valves and installing a receiver for an in-line inspection testing tool. PG&E stated in its Dec. 1 court filing that the up-

grades would allow for easier and less invasive testing of the condition and integrity of PG&E's Line 191-B, a major high-pressure gas transmission pipeline serving large portions of Contra Costa County, including Lafayette, that runs through the station.

Rosenberg said negotiations with PG&E broke down on Nov. 26, and PG&E notified the HOA midday the next day (the day before Thanksgiving) that the utility was going to resume work Dec. 2. The HOA spent much of the holiday weekend preparing to go to court that Monday.

In PG&E's court filing, outside counsel Matthew C. Henderson stated that the pipeline that runs through the Reliez Regulator station has internal and external corrosion threats. "The current regulator station and pipeline do not allow for ILI, as there is no ILI receiver at the station," the filing stated. "A receiver allows the inspection tool to exit the pipeline after it has traveled and inspected the length of the pipeline internally." The filing also noted that due to federal assessment requirements, the line must be inspected by 2020 so work needed to resume quickly.

In a Dec. 6 email, Rosenberg stated, "We didn't win a temporary restraining order since the local judge felt he didn't have authority due to the federal bankruptcy case. PG&E has moved forward and fully clear-cut the entire property." During the court case, Rosenberg said PG&E disclosed to the court that there is an ongoing "immediate anomaly" on the pipeline within 1,800

feet of this project. "This was never disclosed to the community, the city, the city council, nor us before this court filing," he said.

PG&E noted that it recently conducted a non-traditional ILI on a section of Line 191-B in Lafayette, stating, "The assessment found an 'immediate' anomaly on the pipeline located approximately 1,800 feet from Andreasen Drive and the Reliez Station Regulator Station in Lafayette. PG&E is currently planning a dig in this area to further assess and address this anomaly. PG&E has reduced the pressure on the pipeline to ensure the safety of the line while a mitigation plan is completed."

Michael Dawson, on behalf of the Lafayette Gas Safety Task Force, contacted PG&E for clarification about the information in the filing, stating, "As you know, Line 191-B is not where the Reliez regulator station is. If PG&E did a non-traditional ILI on line 191-B off Blackhawk Road earlier this year, then why is PG&E using an anomaly found there as justification for the project on Line 191-1 several miles away? We're concerned what this means for PG&E's gas safety prioritizations."

PG&E's Vice President of Asset Management and System Operations Christine Cowser responded, stating, "The last sentence of the quoted excerpt from our outside counsel's memo inadvertently referenced Line 191-B instead of Line 191-1. We apologize for the confusion. While the immediate anomaly referenced in the memo was not on Line 191-1, its recent detection further supports our belief that ILI is the best assessment method to identify these types of anomalies and otherwise fully understand the condition

of Line 191-1. Completion of the Reliez Station upgrade project is necessary to enable the inspection of this section of Line 191-1 prior to the 2020 compliance deadline."

Dawson sought additional clarification of the situation, since the filing had not only mentioned an anomaly on Line 191-B, but noted the specific location of the anomaly as being "approximately 1,800 feet from Andreasen Drive and the Reliez Station Regulator Station in Lafayette."

"Some Lafayette residents are so concerned," Dawson wrote, "they have taken to measuring the 1,800 feet on either side of the new regulator station to determine the at-risk segment."

Cowser Chapman asked the project team to re-review the project information and noted the following clarifications about the cited anomaly: "The anomaly is located within Meadowlark Court, near Blackhawk Road; the actual distance from this location to the Reliez Station Road regulator station is approximately 2.5 miles, not 1,800 feet; PG&E operates a distribution regulator station approximately 1,800 feet from the Meadowlark Court location."

According to PG&E spokesperson Tamar Sarkissian, Line 191-B was inspected on Sept. 25. "The anomaly was reported as metal loss by the inspection tool vendor on Nov. 18 and fits PG&E's criteria to investigate further," she said. "The line is safe to operate, but pressure was reduced on Nov. 22 as an immediate and precautionary safety measure until we can investigate further. Future plans are to excavate the site to inspect and repair as needed, currently scheduled for early next year."

Happy Holidays



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Photo Greg Fisher

Tree work at PG&E's gas regulator station on Olympic Blvd.

Lafayette Public Meetings
City Council
 TBD



Planning Commission
 Monday, Dec. 16, 7 p.m.
 Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Design Review
 Monday, Dec. 23, 7 p.m.
 Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Arts & Science Discovery Center, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

School Board Meetings
Acalanes Union High School District
 Wednesday, Dec. 11, 7 p.m.
 AUHSD Board Room
 1212 Pleasant Hill Road, Lafayette
 www.acalanes.k12.ca.us

Lafayette School District
 Wednesday, Dec. 18, 7 p.m.
 Regular Board Meeting
 Stanley M.S. Library
 3477 School St., Lafayette
 www.lafsd.k12.ca.us

Kindness the theme of the 41st Annual Community Thanksgiving Breakfast



Photo Pippa Fisher

Sean Perlmutter speaks on the subject of kindness at the Annual Community Thanksgiving Breakfast Nov. 22.

Around 200 early risers were treated to a delicious breakfast Nov. 22. The occasion was the 41st Annual Community Thanksgiving Breakfast, held at the Veterans Memorial Center, hosted by the Chamber of Commerce and attended by community leaders and members.

And as attendees enjoyed the spread, Sean Perlmutter of Pivotal Twist gave an inspirational talk entitled "The Strangers of Kindness" inviting all to consider how, and why to be kind, even when it seems challenging, and how to

overcome those challenges.

Chamber of Commerce President Christina Alba was the master of ceremonies for the occasion. Harpist Wendy Tamis provided beautiful background music and breakfast was catered by Lavash Mediterranean Restaurant and Catering. Reverend Robin Wells of the Lafayette United Methodist Church gave an invocation and Pastor Jorge Chavez of The Living Hope Fellowship provided a benediction to close the event.

- P. Fisher

Home invasion arrests made the day after Lafayette public safety meeting

... continued from Page A1

"Keeping our public safe is our No. 1 priority," Burks said.

A home-invasion robbery took place Oct. 31 on Martino Road, and a similar home invasion occurred Nov. 27 on Crestwood Drive. Three robbers entered each home and assaulted residents in addition to stealing valuables. The chief noted that from January until October, five robberies occurred in Lafayette. But since October, there have been 10 more.

"You should be able to leave your doors unlocked," Alldritt said. "But there is an element in this world that does not abide by our moral rules of conduct."

The chief offered suggestions on keeping homes safe, from the basic like keeping doors and gates locked, closing garage doors and turning lights on, to the more elaborate like installing cameras and putting in an alarm system. Audience members talked about coordinating neighborhood camera networks and creating rosters of neighborhood members, but residents also wanted to know what the police are doing since the crime uptick, and whether the crime increase could be attributed to Proposition 47, which reduced many low-level crimes, such as theft, from a felony to a misdemeanor.

Alldritt had no comment on whether the proposition had any effect on the local crime increase. "Laws change,"

he said. "It is our job to enforce the laws that officials put on our books." The chief assured citizens that the city has added an extra officer on duty during the day, as has the county sheriff's office, through which Lafayette contracts for its police service. At night, the sheriff's office has added two supplemental officers to patrol the city, Alldritt said.

Many attendees wanted an update on the two home invasions, but Alldritt said that he could not comment, as the two incidents were under active investigation. The following day, the Lafayette Police Department announced the arrest of two suspects from Fairfield and charged them with residential burglary, assault with a deadly weapon, robbery, vehicle theft and conspiracy. On Dec. 6, two additional suspects were arrested; one more from Fairfield and one from Vallejo.

"The arrest of these home invasion robbery suspects is the result of good police work," Contra Costa County Sheriff David Livingston said in a statement. "It was a combination of following up on leads, a critical tip from a citizen who reported something suspicious, and teamwork among the law enforcement agencies involved."

At the end of the Dec. 4 meeting, Bliss said that the crime prevention commission will take the suggestions made by residents to the city council and possibly act on some of them in the coming months.



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MORAGA

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Town of Moraga seeks citizen input regarding Unfunded Needs Assessments



Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg Photo Vera Kochan

By Vera Kochan

The Hacienda de las Flores played host for two community meetings to discuss Unfunded Needs Assessments. The purpose of the meetings,

held on Dec. 3 and Dec. 4, was to get public input as to where Moraga's precious funds should be spent. Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg along with several staff members made presentations to the audience of

concerned citizens. Battenberg was pleased to point out that Moraga's finances are taking a positive turn in that the town council recently adopted protocols that will stiffen financial controls. Citing increased sales tax dollars from the new Outdoor Supply Hardware Store, steady home sale prices, Measure K improvements, and a one-time federal reimbursement investment, the town is beginning to see a ray of light at the end of the tunnel.

The three top priority areas seeking public input are: Capital Asset Replacement; California Public Employees' Retirement System Unfunded Pension Liability; and the Storm Drain Master Plan.

With regards to Capital Asset Replacement, Parks and Recreation Director Breyana Brandt's presentation stressed that town services are asset dependent. Parks, the library, the Hacienda,

town offices, landscaping, police vehicles and public works trucks are just some of the town's major capital assets.

The CalPERS Unfunded Pension Liability presentation was given by Administrative Services Director Norman Veloso, who explained, "An unfunded pension liability is the gap between the amount of future benefits a pension fund is expected to pay out and the assets presently in the pension fund." During the 1990s, CalPERS reduced the amount of payments demanded from member cities due to an optimistic stock market. Its unstable investments along with increased life expectancies have resulted in changes to CalPERS actuarial assumptions.

Public Works Department interim public works director/town engineer Shawn Knapp presented the 2019 Addendum to the Storm Drain Master Plan. A field mapping

project involving Geographic Information System data was done on 21 miles of the town's infrastructure. Current storm drain activities involve visual and closed circuit television inspections, debris cleanup and repairs to damaged storm drain pipes.

A feedback questionnaire was handed out to the community meeting attendees in which they could voice their opinions and prioritize the importance of each Unfunded Needs Assessment. The feedback will be presented by staff during the Jan. 8 town council meeting for consideration. Town staff urges citizens to visit the Town of Moraga website (www.moraga.ca.us), read the Power-Point presentations and fill out a feedback questionnaire. Any questions, call Town Clerk Marty McInturf at (925) 888-7022.

Holidays arrive at the Hacienda de las Flores



Moraga Garden Club's Hacienda garden Photos Vera Kochan

By Vera Kochan

The Lamorinda area has many talented artisans, and 43 of them had their crafts for sale during the fourth annual Hacienda Holiday Fair Dec 6-8.

Co-chairs of the event, Jackie Smith and Hollie Lucas-Alcalay, brought the idea to the Hacienda after several years of running it in Smith's Orinda home where the sales force of 17 vendors was considered large.

Lucas-Alcalay sells culinary herbs, herb infused olive oils and bath products under her Hollie's Home-

grown label. Smith sells jewelry under the Beadsmith label. Other vendors offered jams, candy, knit ware, soaps, and holiday themed gifts, just to name a few.

"Our top five sellers are from Moraga, and we have a few from San Francisco," Lucas-Alcalay said. "At least 78% of our vendors are from Lamorinda. They are selected based on handmade and sustainability factors."

Volunteers helped to keep things running smoothly, and the Department of Parks and Recreation was the current sponsor benefiting from the event; all raffle ticket proceeds and

table rental fees went into the Parks and Rec coffers.

No holiday fair can be complete without a beautifully decorated Christmas tree. This year's labor of love was done by some members of the disbanded Moraga Women's Society: Nancy Compelli, Roberta Klaproth, Colleen Lund and Susan Sperry.

In a section along the back fence of the Hacienda near the Casita, the Moraga Garden Club continues to maintain a corner of the world with an artful array of trees and plants that have turned gold and orange with the season.



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Town Council
 Wednesday, Dec. 11, 7 p.m.
 Council Chambers and Community Meeting Room, 335 Rheem Blvd.
Planning Commission: Monday, Dec. 16, 7 p.m.
 Council Chambers and Community Meeting Room, 335 Rheem Blvd.
Park and Recreation Commission: Tuesday, Dec. 17, 7 p.m.
 Council Chambers and Community Meeting Room, 335 Rheem Blvd.
Moraga School District Board Meetings: Thursday, Jan. 14, 7 p.m.
 Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium, 1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
 www.moraga.k12.ca.us. See also AUHSD meeting page A2

New town of Moraga website in the works

By Vera Kochan

Dissatisfaction from staff and town residents has led to a decision to revamp the town's current website. From a staff point of view there is limited functionality, a lack of modern advances and inefficient interfacing on the existing website. Residents have complained about the difficulty in navigation and information tracking.

Parks and Recreation Director Breyana Brandt gave an update on the redesign and launch of the new website during the Nov. 13 town council meeting, noting that rather than have three separate websites for the town of Moraga, the Parks and Recreation Department and the Moraga Police Department, all will be located under the umbrella of the town's website.

After reviewing 10 responses to their Request for Proposals, staff agreed to contract with CivicPlus to design and develop the new town website. According to Brandt's staff report, "CivicPlus provides an integrated technology platform designed specifically for local government. The CivicPlus platform delivers web technology, website design, content man-

agement and mass notification communication tools. CivicPlus remains a prominent website service provider for local municipal websites in Contra Costa County with current customers that include the cities of Danville, El Cerrito, Orinda, Pleasant Hill, San Ramon and Contra Costa County."

Parks and Rec currently uses CivicPlus - Civic Rec software for program registration and facility bookings. Additional benefits will include a government focused design; easy-to-use content management; accessibility; search engine optimization; secure hosting and ongoing technical support.

A one-time cost of \$16,813 covers the design and development. An \$18,000 one-time consultant services fee covers a projected 180 hours at \$100 per hour. Both costs are budgeted in the current fiscal year. Ongoing maintenance costs begin the second year and are estimated at \$3,775, an increase of \$575 from the current annual maintenance cost of \$3,200.

The projected timeline to initiate the new website begins in January. Various phases follow: analyze; design and configure; optimize;

educate and finally the projected launch phase in May. At some point in time, the public's input will be sought in the hopes that the end result will be very user friendly and meet a variety of needs.

Moraga Chamber president provides free business mentoring to Lamorinda through SCORE

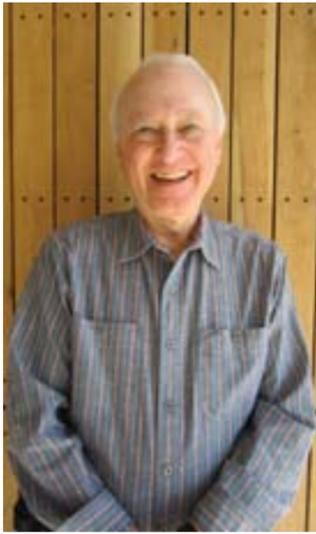


Photo Vera Kochan

Larry Tessler local SCORE counselor

By Vera Kochan

SCORE is a national organization that was established over 50 years ago to provide free small business counseling. The Virginia-based company utilizes the expert talents of 13,000 volunteers who counsel through local chapters. One of those volunteers is Moraga Chamber of Commerce President Larry Tessler.

"The Oakland chapter is No. 1 for the past year. I do most of the counseling in the area often meeting at our Moraga Starbucks. I also do the most counseling in the chapter," Tessler said. "I have served most every position in the chapter over the 20 years I've been doing this volunteer work. I currently serve on our executive committee, and I run our Facebook page."

SCORE's website (www.score.org) states that it has provided mentorship to more than 11 million entrepreneurs through the years, with the greater Bay Area boasting five chapters located in San Jose, San Francisco, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz and Oakland, and over 300 chapters nationwide. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, SCORE is a resource partner

of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Tessler estimates that he's mentored approximately 2,500 small business entrepreneurs during his tenure with SCORE. His business background goes back many years from working in the retail industry with stores such as Emporium-Capwell, Mervyn's and Rainbow Records. He became semi-retired when he and his wife, Carol, opened their own successful sign making business in Walnut Creek. After five years they sold the company and decided to spend their retirement traveling.

Tessler and his wife have long served the Lamorinda area through volunteer work. "We don't have kids, so our greatest satisfaction is seeing people succeed. I feel like I've played a small part in it," he said, adding, "I'm a little bit nuts. I like to remain busy."

He was approached by a friend to attend a SCORE session. "I came to a chapter meeting to see what SCORE was all about and was hooked." He was assigned a coach and began doing co-counseling.

Tessler gives clients business planning directions, general legal advice and patent related instruction. He keeps abreast of the latest trends by combing through online articles and taking seminars to keep up with concepts and techniques.

When seeking advice any potential client is matched with a counselor that meets their needs. While one-on-one counseling (in person, by email or phone) is free, SCORE does offer a variety of webinars and local events for a moderate fee. The workshops have different modules that deal with legal aspects, advertising, social media, retail basics, export/import, accounting, acquiring financial backing and opening a restaurant.

To contact the local East Bay SCORE chapter visit www.eastbayscore.org or call (510)273-6611.

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Probably the first decision is whether you want to continue living in the house. Will the familiar surroundings bring you comfort and emotional security, or unpleasant memories? Do you want to minimize change by staying where you are, or sell your home and move to a new place that offers a new start? Only you can answer those questions, but there will almost certainly be some financial repercussions to your decision process. What can you afford? Can you manage the old house on your new budget? Is refinancing possible? Or is it better to sell and buy? How much house can you buy on your new budget?

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Orinda garbage fees rise by 12%, no relief for private road residents

By Sora O'Doherty

Garbage collections fees will rise by 12% for Orinda customers for the period March 1, 2020 to Feb. 28, 2021. With this increase, Orinda will have the highest garbage fees in Contra Costa County, according to city manager Steve Salomon. The increase comprises 4% for operating costs of Republic, 1% for long-term maintenance of Big Belly smart containers, and 7% for vehicle impact fees, imposed to offset the damage done by heavy garbage trucks to public roads. Although the fees are imposed on all customers, the funds will only be expended on public roads, leading to protests from residents of pri-

private roads, who seek either to be included in the repair work or to be exempted from the fee. Two longtime private road advocates submitted their views on the matter: Steve Cohn in an email sent to the city council prior to the meeting and Melissa Roeder, who spoke at the meeting. Cohn told council members, "When the fee was small, the inequality could be ignored." But, he continued, "it is no longer small and it looks like it is growing by leaps and bounds." Roeder said that the increase taxes everyone, but only benefits four-fifths of the city. She suggested that either private road residents should not be forced to pay the vehicle impact fees, or their streets

should also receive the benefits of the fees. Council Member Dennis Fay did not object to the portion of the increase that is due to the increased cost of doing business, but did object to the portion of the increase (about 7 percentage points of the 12% increase) that is related to the road impact fee, because he did not agree with the method used to calculate the amount of funds the city is using for roads. He ultimately voted against the increase. Council Member Inga Miller offered two suggestions: Private road residents may, she said, bring their refuse containers to public roads for collection. She said that she had checked this with Republic Ser-

vices, who agreed that it would be allowed. There were no details offered on how exactly that would work. In addition, Miller pointed out that the garbage vehicles caused damage while traveling over public roads to reach the private roads. Mayor Darlene Gee noted that the increases won't be popular, but agreed with other council members that service under Republic Services is much better than in the past. The portion for the popular Big Belly containers is intended to offset the fact that recycling no longer provides income to the city, following dramatic changes in the industry. The fee increase passed by a 4-1 vote.

In-lieu parking variance fee approved

By Sora O'Doherty

Senior Planner Adam Foster presented the city council with a plan to charge a fee to developers who need a variance from the required number of parking spaces for new or changed non-residential developments. Currently if a development requires a variance the city may grant it, but can-

not charge a fee. Under the proposed ordinance, fees would be collected and put toward mitigating parking in Orinda. Potential mitigations might include a parking lot or shuttle services. The in-lieu fee will not apply to residential buildings. The proposed fees will be a tiered system, increasing for each parking space that is sought to be eliminated, and

will cover both new construction and changes in use of existing buildings. For existing buildings, the fees will be lower, to encourage economic activity. The fees for existing buildings will start at \$1,275 for the first parking space eliminated, and gradually rise to \$6,375 for the fifth and any additional spaces. Existing buildings are defined as those that have been in place for

over five years. For new construction, the fees would be higher, starting at \$7,650 for the first space and rising to \$28,050 for the fifth and additional spaces. The fees are based on a study that identified the cost per parking space in Orinda as \$51,000. The in-lieu fee represents a fractional portion of that cost. ... continued on next Page

Orinda City Council wants answers, in writing, from PG&E

By Sora O'Doherty

How did things go in Orinda during the public safety power shut offs in November? The city council heard from staff at its Dec. 3 meeting, and decided it wanted the Pacific Gas and Electric Company to answer some questions, and they wanted the answers in writing. PG&E representative Tom Guarino was present at the meeting, but the council did not wish to receive oral comments. Staff were charged with writing to PG&E to request information about whether the high voltage power lines that run through Orinda were actually turned off during the two PSPSs. All of Orinda's electricity supply lines are underground, so the city council wants to know if there is a way that power to residents and commercial customers

could be maintained. Issues reviewed included costs to businesses, hardships for residents, and communications. Council Member Dennis Fay asked about what lessons were learned during the events. Public Works Director and Assistant City Manager Larry Theis presented the staff review. He said that the city-operated PSPS resource center was well received, and the public used it as a place to congregate and communicate, as well as to charge devices. The biggest complaint he reported was the lack of WiFi. Residents were surprised that cell phones were throttled down on data during the power outages. This pointed out that Orinda was one of only a few communities that provided its own resource centers, but he also explained that extra costs were incurred as

Orinda staff were pulled from their regular duties to assist at the center. Theis also said that the purchase of \$10,000 worth of portable stop signs was a good investment. Council Member Amy Worth complimented and thanked staff, noting that city manager Steve Salomon put together a team and met weekly to put together a punch list. She also complimented the Orinda Union School District for moving rapidly on its decision to keep schools open in time to use email communication before the power outage began. On the subject of communications, Theis noted that residents may be unaware that the city does not have contact information for residents. PG&E and Comcast, he said, have such access to this information from their customer files. Residents will continue to be encouraged to sign up for alerts.



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Mayor Darlene Gee said that during the second outage, CalTrans hired a generator to operate the traffic signals at the complicated intersection at Brookwood that also controls traffic exiting Highway 24. Fay was disturbed by the hardships suffered by residents of the Senior Village, who were without power for three days. This meant that they did not have heat, lights or elevators. Fay said he hoped that PG&E has a program to operate the grid to keep power on and wondered what other options exist instead of the PSPSs. He raised the issue of the high voltage lines, and said that he wanted written answers from PG&E that the city could depend on.

Council Member Inga Miller supported the concept of legislation, and Worth applauded state Sen. Steve Glazer for proposing legislation to require back-up generators for cell phone towers. She also hoped that the Chamber of Commerce might be able to provide better information about the cost of the outages to local businesses. Gee said that the city wants to be part of the process of the California Public Utilities Commission. Theis said that Orinda will sign up with the CPUC as a participating agency, even though it will come at a cost of staff time. Theis also said that PG&E is working on system hardening,

replacing old poles, updating system parts such as transformers, and improving insulation on lines. Like Fay, Gee wants to know if the high voltage lines in Orinda were actually turned off, citing the Kincaid fire that was sparked by a high voltage line that was supposed to be turned off but wasn't, even though the surrounding area had no power. Fay also asked for further explanation from PG&E about system hardening. In answer to a question from Fay about fiber optic cable for cell phones, city attorney Osa Wolff said that the city had just gone through the process for small cell installations.

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Orinda Public Meetings

City Council
 Tuesday, Dec. 17, 7 p.m.
 Regular Meeting
 Library Auditorium, Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way

Planning Commission
 TBA
 Library Auditorium, Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way

Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Commission
 Wednesday, Dec. 11, cancelled
 Sarge Littlehale Community Room, 22 Orinda Way, Orinda, CA 94563

Orinda Union High School District Board Meetings
 Monday, Jan. 13, 6 p.m.
 Regular Board Meeting
 8 Altarinda Rd., Orinda www.orindaschools.org
 See also AUHSD meeting page A2

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In-lieu parking variance fee approved

... continued from Page A6

The question was raised, "Why not charge developers 100% of the cost?" Foster explained that in-lieu fees are a balancing act. If the fees are too high, they will discourage development. He pointed to the neighboring city of Lafayette, which started out with a high parking variance fee of \$38,000, but didn't collect owing to a lack of development. When Lafayette lowered its fees to \$19,200, the city collected more because developments happened. City Manager Steve Salomon pointed out that the level of the fees can be changed once Orinda sees how they work.

Council Member Nick Kosla pointed out that Orinda has had a very difficult time getting development going. He supported the measure, and said he would be fine lowering the top tier of the fees to the fourth parking space and above. Council Member Inga Miller agreed that this is one way to spur development, even though, she said, "the unknown is scary." The measure was supported by Paul Ugenti, owner of the land at 25A Orinda Way, who said that he will be submitting a new plan for the property soon. Former planning commission chair Terry Murphy joined the planning commission in recommending approval of the fee, especially for land use changes. Michael Bowen said that the Friends of Orinda Creeks enthusiastically supported the measure and urged adoption without change.

Planning Director Drummond Buckley pointed out that the five-year bar for existing development is intended to rule out rapid changes of use. Salomon said that staff will return with a resolution with some options. The ordinance passed with unanimous support of the council.

Gee moves up to mayor, Worth returns as vice mayor in Orinda reorg



New Mayor Darlene Gee, left, and Vice Mayor Amy Worth sworn in. Photo Sora O'Doherty

By Sora O'Doherty

After being officially elected as mayor of Orinda, Darlene Gee joked about having the most experienced vice mayor in Amy Worth. Both were unanimously elected by the Orinda City Council and took the oath of office with city clerk Sheri Smith at the council's Dec. 3 meeting.

Gee was first elected in 2012 and reelected in 2016. She became

vice mayor in 2018. Her current term of office expires at the end of 2020. Worth was first elected in 1998 and has been continuously reelected for six terms of office. Her current term expires at the end of 2022. She has served as mayor four times, more than any other mayor of Orinda. If precedent holds, she will advance to mayor for another term in 2020.

Outgoing mayor Inga Miller was honored with a proclamation from the other members of the city

council, by County Supervisor Candice Andersen and a representative of Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan as well as state Sen. Steve Glazer. Andersen praised Miller's tremendous commitment to the citizens of Orinda. Dan de Busschere said, "We started out with a rookie and ended up with a battle-hardened veteran who was on national television explaining to the world that Orinda is a welcoming place."



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During the Holiday Season

more than ever, my thoughts turn gratefully to those who have made my progress possible. And in this spirit I would like to say, simply but sincerely...

Thank You and Best Wishes for the Holiday Season and a Happy New Year.

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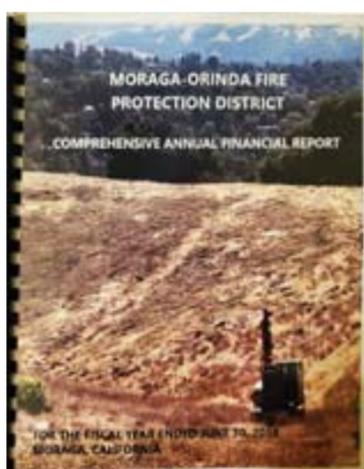
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MOFD releases its audited annual financial report

By Nick Marnell



The Moraga-Orinda Fire District formally wrapped up its 2019 fiscal year with the issuance of its sixth audited Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, showing that the district has increased its net position – a government financial term roughly equivalent to net worth – for the second consecutive year. The district also achieved a 31% general fund balance reserve, higher than the 17% board requirement but still short of the district 50% goal as a hedge against economic uncertainties.

The 31% of general fund revenue that MOFD threw to its bottom line equaled \$7.8 million, largely a result of a 13% in-

crease in revenue for the fiscal year. Property tax revenue rose 6.5% to \$24.6 million and district program revenue, including ambulance, inspection and plan review fees, increased more than \$1 million.

One of the key areas of emphasis for 2019 CAFR was the accounting for the North Orinda Shaded Fuel Break, a \$4 million state-funded fuels mitigation project managed by the district. The grant came to MOFD in May, but because the 2019 fiscal year ended June 30, only about one month of project operation was reflected in the audited financial statements. Future reports will show a much larger balance sheet for the fuel break project, segregated from the district regular operating costs.

Though the MOFD net position increased \$7 million for the second consecutive year, the figure sits at a negative \$29.6 million, largely due to a \$34.4 million net pension liability and a \$14.8 million net retiree health care liability. Nevertheless, the district's net position is its highest since 2014, when it was nearly \$10 million to the good.

The district won its fourth certificate of achievement for excellence in financial reporting for its 2018 CAFR. The award is presented by the Governmental Finance Officers Association, and the award recognizes the accuracy and clarity of the presented data, with no judgment on the actual contents of the financial reports themselves.

MOFD and Pacific Mountain settle civil complaint

By Nick Marnell

Another damage complaint against the Moraga-Orinda Fire District was settled favorably in November when the district and Pacific Mountain Contractors, which had secured the original bid to rebuild Fire Station 43 in Orinda, agreed to settle their grievances at no cost.

In 2017, Pacific pulled out of its \$2.66 million agreement

with MOFD over what it cited were significant errors in the plans and specifications in the contract to rebuild the fire station. Rather than litigate, the district attempted to renegotiate, but MOFD determined that Pacific was unwilling to build the station at any price, demanding release from the contract in June 2017.

According to the 2017 separation agreement, Pacific paid MOFD \$54,000 to walk

away and agreed to assign \$110,000 of preparatory work owed to its subcontractors. The district absorbed the subcontractor charges and built them into the terms of its \$3.34 million contract with a succeeding contractor, which failed to live up to the terms of its agreement. The station was eventually completed in 2019 at a cost of \$6 million.

Pacific sued the district in 2018 for an additional \$39,000

it claimed were costs the company had to pay subcontractors, for which it said MOFD should have been responsible. The district countersued for breach of contract. On Nov. 22, both the contractor and the district agreed to settle all claims asserted by each party, with no damage costs incurred by either side.

Representatives from Pacific Mountain could not be reached for comment.

In October, the Contra Costa County Superior Court dismissed charges against the district by former Fire Chief Pete Nowicki, who claimed that MOFD was obligated to make up the nearly \$600,000 stripped from his pension by the Contra Costa County Employees' Retirement Association because its board determined that the pension was calculated improperly.

Sheriff's office to increase patrols in Lafayette and Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty

Contra Costa Sheriff David Livingston announced on Nov. 27 that he has assigned additional patrol deputies to both the Lafayette and Orinda communities immediately. The sheriff's office provides law enforcement and public safety services to both Orinda and Lafayette through contracts.

These deputy sheriffs will augment the Lafayette and Orinda police departments' regular patrols and will remain in those cities until further notice. The deputies will work both daytime and nighttime hours in fully marked patrol vehicles. The announcement indicated that other security measures have also been stepped up and are ongoing.

"Anytime we see a rise in

criminal activity, especially violent crime, we react immediately," said Livingston. In addition, he said, "the citizens of Orinda and Lafayette should know we are out in force – some measures will be highly visible like our additional patrol deputies and other measures will be more covert. Our goal remains unchanged, to keep Contra Costa families safe."

Orinda Police Chief David Cook has said that the additional coverage being provided by the sheriff's office will not be charged to the cities of Orinda or Lafayette. The deputies will be patrolling in sheriff's office cars and uniforms. Cook explained, "I work very closely with the Command Staff of the Sheriff's Field Operations Bureau."

In reply to social media comments, Livingston clari-

fied that the additional coverage in Lafayette and Orinda will not have any impact on the deployment of deputies or coverage of unincorporated areas. The patrol deputies being assigned to Lafayette and Orinda will come from other units in the sheriff's office.

The announcement made via social media resulted in a number of negative comments about the sheriff, coverage of wealthy versus poorer areas of the county, and calls for allowing more citizens to carry concealed weapons.

Letters to the editor

A request for a bike park

I am writing to you due to the fact that I believe Orinda, Moraga and Lafayette should have a local bike park in Briones Regional Park. Not only can a bike park create a community for local mountain bikers in Lamorinda, but also it can put more children off their screens and on their bikes.

Bike parks like Valmont in Boulder, Colorado, are home to

little 6-year-olds learning to ride bikes alongside Red Bull athletes practicing their flips. A bike park in Briones could completely transform mountain bikers in our community and bring us together with a shared interest.

I am a local Boy Scout from Troop 219 here in Lafayette and am also a bike park enthusiast!

Will Appleton
Lafayette

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters must be factually accurate and be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. Visit www.lamorindaweekly.com for submission guidelines. Email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Fire District Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District
Board of Directors
Wednesday, Dec. 18, 6 p.m.
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas.
Visit www.mofd.org



ConFire

Board of Directors
Tuesday, Jan. 21, 1:00 p.m.
Board Chamber Room 107,
Administration Building
651 Pine St., Martinez.
For meeting times and agendas, visit www.cccfpd.org



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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

Nov. 17 - Nov. 30

Alarms	74
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	14
Traffic	142
Suspicious Circumstances	11
Suspicious Subject	35
Suspicious Vehicle	23
Service to Citizen	44
Patrol Req./Security Check	24
Pub/School Assembly Check	2
Supplemental Report	16
Vacation House Check	27
Welfare Check	15

Vehicle violations

Auto Burglary
20 Block Lafayette Cr.
900 Block Bell St.



Police Department
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd. (2)
30 Block Lafayette Cr.

Hit And Run Misdemeanor
1300 Block Martino Rd.
3500 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Pleasant Hill Rd./Olympic Oaks Dr.

Petty Theft From Vehicle
1200 Block Woodborough Rd.
3900 Block N Peardale Dr.

Petty Theft Vehicle Parts
1300 Block El Curtola Blvd.

Reckless Driving
Mt. Diablo Blvd./Moraga Rd.
Pleasant Hill Rd./Deer Hill Rd. (2)
Oak Hill Rd./Eb Sr 24
Mt. Diablo Blvd./Dolores Dr.
St. Marys Rd./Rohrer Dr.
Reliez Station Rd./Olympic Blvd.

Other criminal activity

Commercial Burglary
1000 Block Carol Ln.

Forgery
Police Department
Fraud False Pretenses
500 Block Arrowhead Dr.

Grand Theft
3500 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd.
20 Block Lafayette Cr.

Petty Theft
3600 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd. (2)
100 Block Bacon Ct.

Petty Theft Bicycle
3500 Block Wildwood Ln.
Residential Burglary
10 Block Westwind Rd.
1100 Block Crestmont Dr.

Shoplift
3600 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd. (4)
3500 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd. (3)

Nuisance to the Community
Civil Disturbance
3200 Block Stanley Blvd.
Disturbance-domestic
3500 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Loud Noise
3600 Block Chestnut St.
Mountain View Pl./Mountain View Dr.
900 Block Dewing Ave.

Loud Noise
1400 Block Rancho View Dr.
Public Nuisance
3600 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Other

Animal Control Call
Deer Hill Rd./Brown Ave.

Battery
3600 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd. (2)

H&S Violation
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.
Indecent Exposure
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Ordinance Violation
Wilkinson Ln./Moraga Rd.
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Threats
Pleasant Hill Rd./Deer Hill Rd.
3600 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Trespass
700 Block St. Marys Rd.
Unwanted Guest
400 Block Peacock Blvd.
3500 Blk Mt. Diablo Blvd.
900 Block 4th St.

Violation Custody Order
3400 Block Moraga Blvd.

Moraga Police Department

Incident Summary Report

Nov. 19 - Dec. 2

Alarms	20
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	10
Traffic	25
Suspicious Circumstances	5
Suspicious Subject	2
Suspicious Vehicle	10
Service to Citizen	63
Patrol Req./Security Check	30
Supplemental Report	17
Welfare Check	6

Vehicle violations

Auto Burglary
Moraga Commons Park
School St/Moraga Way

Dui Misdemeanor
Moraga Way/Ivy Dr.
1900 Block St. Marys Rd.

Hit And Run Misdemeanor
10 Block Warfield Dr.

Reckless Driving
Moraga Way/Camino Ricardo
Moraga Valley Ln./Moraga Way
Moraga Rd./St. Marys Rd.



Other criminal activity

Assault with Deadly Weapon
100 Block Donald Dr.

Fraud Credit Card
300 Block Rheem Blvd.

Grand Theft
Canyon Rd./Camino Pablo

Terrorist Threats
St. Marys College

Nuisance to the Community
Barking Dog
Not Available
Disturbance-domestic
Not Available
Disturbing The Peace
Not Available
Loud Music
1200 Block Rimer Dr.

Loud Noise
1700 Block School St.
300 Block Rheem Blvd.

Loud Party
2000 Block Ascot Dr. (3)
Public Nuisance
Rheem Valley Shopping Center

Other
Harassment
2100 Block Donald Dr.
Mentally Ill Commit
Campolindo High School
Public Assembly Check
St. Marys College
Rheem Valley Shopping Center (2)

Trespass
1300 Block Moraga Rd.

Walk Through
Moraga Commons Park



Orinda Police Department

Incident Summary Report

Nov. 17 - Nov. 30

Alarms	56
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	14
Traffic	27
Suspicious Circumstances	5
Suspicious Subject	7
Suspicious Vehicle	2

Service to Citizen	61
Patrol Req./Security Check	20
Public/School Assembly Check	6
Supplemental Report	10
Vacation House Check	10
Welfare Check	1

Vehicle violations

Accident Property
Camino Sobrante/Camino Pablo,
Camino Pablo/Monte Vista Rd.

Auto Burglary
Orinda Country Club
Hit And Run Misdemeanor
Safeway

Petty Theft From Vehicle
70 Block El Toyonal
Reckless Driving
Van Ripper Ln./Van Tassel Ln.
Davis Rd./Bates Blvd.
Camino Pablo/Eb Sr 24
Miner Rd./Camino Sobrante
Glorietta Blvd./Moraga Way
Beverages And More

Trespass with Vehicle
Donald Dr./Moraga Rd.

Other criminal activity

Burglary
10 Block Charles Hill Rd.
Forgery
Bank of America

Identity Theft
10 Block Rita Way
Petty Theft
Rite Aid

Sunnyside Ln./Van Tassel Ln.
50 Block Moraga Way
Robbery Strongarm
Starbucks (2)

Threats
Orinda Intermediate School
Warrant Arrest
Shell

Nuisance to the Community
Barking Dog
80 Block Hillcrest Dr. (2)
Public Nuisance
Knickerbocker Ln./Stein Way

Other

Beat Info
Wb Sr 24 At St Stephens Dr. (2)
Hailed By Citizen
10 Block E Altarinda Dr.

Prowler Heard
500 Block Moraga Way

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A walk down memory lane with Hilton House



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Hilton House Staff Honored. From left: Marilynn Davis, Dulce Lorenzo, Cyndi Hilton Girgis, Mayor Inga Miller, Rita Kuhner and Janice Vincak

By Sora O'Doherty

On a cold, dark Dec. 5 evening, Hilton House Con-sign/Designs, Inc. shined brightly as guests enjoyed live music, food and drink as the company celebrated its 20th anniversary doing business in Orinda. With “golden ticket” prizes every half hour, guests roamed the shop, filled to the rafters with nostalgic items from vintage jewelry, to antique silverware. New Orinda Library manager Michael Beller bought a colorful pocket square to complement his green jacket.

Displayed in a prominent place was the certificate awarded by Mayor Inga Miller at the city council meeting on Dec. 3, proclaiming recognition of the shop's 20-year anniversary of providing a wonderful service to

the residents of Orinda and beyond. At that meeting, Council Member Amy Worth recalled, “When we were building the Caldecott Tunnel, the first day after the fourth bore opened, three women from Piedmont came through the tunnel to visit Hilton House, where they spent hours browsing!”

Twenty years ago, owner Cyndi Hilton Girgis sold her internet domain registration business in Silicon Valley. At a loose end, she felt she needed to give back to her community. Girgis had always been interested in recycling. She also wondered what she could do with her good crystal, and other luxury items. There was no social media back then, and no place to sell used items. She asked around. “How does consignment work,” she in-

quired. Soon she opened a small shop, 800 square feet, a few doors down from the current location of her shop. Within three months, the shop outgrew its space, and Hilton House moved to the 3,000 square foot location on Orinda Way. Recently, Girgis has added another 1,000 square foot annex for mirror and larger furniture items.

The community, Girgis says, loves the upscale feel of the shop. She pays 60% of the sale price of fine jewelry, and 40% of the price of furniture and tabletop items to the owners who consign items. She employs five permanent part-time staff, Janice Vincak, Rita Kuhner, Dulce Lorenzo, and Marilynn Davis.

For more information, visit the website, www.hiltonhousedesigns.com

Lamorinda produced wines – a labor of love



Photos provided

A view of Magalhaes Vineyards, which overlooks Moraga Shopping Center.

By Vera Kochan

With the holidays in full swing, good food and good cheer go hand in hand. When thinking about wine, usually the Napa or Sonoma valleys come to mind, but with a microclimate that is perfect for wine production the Lamorinda area is coming into its own.

Of the approximately 70 wine-growers and producers involved with the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association, most have careers outside of the industry. Realizing the potential to turn a backyard into a vineyard, a hobby became a labor of love.

One such vintner is Moraga resident and LWGA co-founder Joao Magalhaes. Formerly a civil engineer with Bechtel Engineering Company, he never intended to grow grapes when he built his home high on a hill overlooking the Moraga Shopping Center in 2004. Having a backyard that sloped was a challenge. After exchanging notes on home construction and wine production with Dave Parker, a fellow vintner, he decided that grape growing was a good idea.

“I contacted the Town of Moraga to see if it was okay to plant a vineyard,” Magalhaes said. “It would be good for fire prevention. Some roots go 10-feet deep and that’s good for land stabilization.”

Wanting to do things right the first

time, he consulted with Brother Timothy Diener of Saint Mary’s College who was a pioneer in the California wine industry and a cellar master for Christian Brothers Winery. At the same time, Magalhaes and Parker formed the LWGA, borrowing the bylaws from the Livermore Winegrowers Association. Their first meeting in 2005 included a membership of wine lovers, growers and producers.

Using a vineyard manager that handles all of the actual growth process, Magalhaes and his wife, Monica, currently produce Pinot Noir, Sirah and Merlot bearing his Villa Calacola label. “I don’t sell my wine,” he stated, “I give it to friends, family and charity.”

LWGA President Bill Scanlin of Lafayette is the owner and winemaker of Deer Hill Vineyards. He began his business in 1998 when a friend, who had a vineyard, talked him into it, stating that his hillside was perfect for grape growing.

“I bought grapes from Napa and started making wine before the crops came in between 1999-2000,” Scanlin noted. “It took about five years to get them going, and I went commercial in 2010.” He currently produces Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese and Chardonnay with Zinfandel on the horizon.

Explaining how he chose his label, Scanlin said, “I tried to find a name

that I could trademark and since I live off Deer Hill Road, it was easy.” He built his tasting room in 2015, and offers wine tasting by appointment. His wines are also available in Diablo Foods and Total Wine & More. His website is deerhillvineyards.com.

Moraga resident and LWGA Vice President Carol Haag, whose label is Rheem Valley Vineyard, said she “got talked into planting grapes in the yard from Joao Magalhaes.” She’s been doing it since 2009 using family, friends and a picking staff to help with the harvest.

When asked what was a good year for her grapes, she recalled, “I think 2012 was the best year, and I’m looking forward to 2019. A bad year was 2015 because of drought, animals and birds eating the grapes and just the temperature fluctuation in general.” She is in the process of getting a website up and running.

Orinda’s Bill English has been producing wine on and off since 1976. His winery, Meadow View, uses grapes from growers Doug Spear and Isabelle Ord among others, to make his Chardonnays, Cabernets and Super T (from the Tuscan region of Italy – a blend of 85% Sangiovese, 7.5% Cabernet Franc and 7.5% Cabernet Sauvignon).

Growing up in Ohio, English didn’t

know much about wines until moving to California after college. “My friends and I went on trips to the wine country a lot, and I decided that I liked wine. I also like to make things, so what do I want to do about that?”

English has been in the wine business for 18 years advancing from amateur status to commercial in 2014, with a focus on making wine from Lamorinda grapes. With a degree in chemical engineering and a career working for Chevron, he recalls, “I worked as a guy who buys and sells oil.” Rather than move out of state for the job, he decided to become an oil industry consultant, but after retiring from the field he decided to devote himself full time to wines. For more information visit www.MeadowViewWinery.net.

Larry Thal of Thal Vineyards LLC is currently in talks with Lafayette’s planning commission to take over the space vacated by Napa Auto Parts and turn it into a Lamorinda wine tasting and sales venue. His website is www.thalvineyards.com.

The Lamorinda Winegrowers Association hosts regular meetings and offers insights into the aspects of winegrowing. To find information about an upcoming meeting, visit lamorindawinegrowers.com.



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Lamorinda rings in the holiday season



Photo Gint Federas

... continued from Page A1

While advanced reservations are required for the Lafayette Historical Society's annual Breakfast with Santa benefit Dec. 15 at Sideboard in Lafayette (see story Page B6), children can visit with Santa at Moraga's 5A-Rent-A-Space during its annual free holiday event from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dec. 14

which will include crafts and treats. Crafts will also be center stage at the Second Annual Girls Crushing It pop-up shop from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15 at the Lafayette Community Center. The Winter Pop-up Shop will showcase 60 local "girlpreneurs" proudly presenting everything from their homemade bath products and pet treats, to original works of art to handmade jewelry (see story on Page B4).

Looking for something to enhance your holiday cheer? Don't miss the free screening of "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" at 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 12 at the Orinda Theatre. Interested in something more traditional? The singing and ringing choirs of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Lafayette will present their annual Christmas concert at 4 p.m. on Dec. 15. "Faith, Fun, and a Feast," includes a little religious Christmas music, a lot of popular Christmas music, and ends with "A Feast of Carols," composed by Randol Alan Bass for the Dallas Symphony and Symphony Chorus. While admission is free, a freewill offering will be taken, with half the proceeds going to Contra Costa Interfaith Housing, helping the homeless find permanent homes.

Finally, the holidays would not be as special without remembering those we love. For 33 years, Hospice East Bay's Tree of Lights ceremonies have offered community members a way to honor the lives of friends and loved ones. Lights are illuminated and names of loved ones those wish to honor or remember are read aloud during the 30-40 minute ceremony. The final Hospice Tree of Lights event in Lamorinda will be held at 5 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15 at Moraga Country Club. —J. Wake

Moraga Art Gallery: reincarnated in time for the holidays



The gallery

Photo Sophie Braccini

By Sophie Braccini

The new location of the Moraga Art Gallery exemplifies beautifully how a major setback can turn into an unexpected blessing. Only a few months ago, gallery members heard through the grapevine that their month-to-month lease on a space in the Rheem Shopping Center would abruptly come to an end. Member-artists left, sadness rose. But today, a new place has been found, in the same center but in a much larger and visible space. New member-artists have joined, the inauguration was a blast, and the public visits the new location at a higher rate, finding there unique gifts and wonderful local art.

George Ehrenhaft, a member-artist, was beaming with joy at the gallery shortly after it reopened. He quickly put away the high ladder he was using to fix a light and started showing off the space. Maybe twice as large as the previous location, the gallery is full of light, and can feature many artists at the same time while giving each the space their work deserves to be well highlighted.

Ehrenhaft is a painter who is a longtime member of the artists co-op and he tells how the gallery lost its space to a new consignment store. The center's management proposed the site next to

Tangelo's that was a bit small for the artists, and then mentioned the 2,400 square feet available between Dover Saddlery and Nation's. This specific spot is believed to have been a karate studio and a bank. Now cleaned up, repainted, lighted and furnished by the gallery members it is a very attractive and effective showroom. Current president Lucy Beck commented that the shopping center's management treated them very well and that the group feels grateful. Of course the generous move comes with a counterpart: the gallery would have to vacate should a paying tenant manifest.

But at the moment the sword of Damocles does not dampen the optimistic mood of the artists and, in fact, the group that shrank from 12 to six artist-members is now boasting 20, many of the new ones being former members of the Lafayette Art Gallery that closed several years ago.

A large number of the old and new members' works are on display now in Moraga, creating a symphony of creativity, colors, shapes, styles and mediums that is very invigorating. Painters such as Debbie Koonce, Carla Gerlbaum, George Ehrenhaft and Lucy Beck who were original members are displayed alongside new members like Irene Nidoba and her passionate surrealist imagery;

very interesting abstract painter Susan Erikson; and simple while mysterious landscape painter Jill Landau. Additionally, for this season exhibit called "Serendipities," the gallery welcomes guest painters such as Graig Crossley, who presents his lively abstract work.

Paintings are on the walls, but all around the gallery creations of wood workers, ceramists, jewelry makers and more are on display. Carol Balala's lovely felted wool soaps can be purchased; a large metal mammal by guest artist sculptor Joe Bologna is on display; woodwork guest artist Rick Nelson presents very creative and beautiful inlaid turned wood bowls; MaryLee Miller, the latest artist to join the gallery, presents her skillfully created ceramic decorative balls. The bronze and ceramic sculptures of the incredibly talented new member Judy Bolef Miller attract a lot of attention, and make sure not to miss her bronze "Liberty and Justice" statue.

Very different styles of jewelry are on display, from creations by Kay DeGroot, who designs necklaces and earrings around unique pendants and beads she has collected around the world, or the delicate vegetable parchment jewelry that Margaret Dorfman invents. Coasters, cards and scarfs are also some of the items that can be found in the gallery.

A separate space is still unused and ideas are being proposed by the collective such as transforming it for art classes or offering it as an exhibition space for high school art class students.

During all of December the gallery will be open every day — including weekends — from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and is staffed by member-artists. More information at moragaartgallery.com.

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Moraga Ranch – An unofficial town landmark



Moraga Ranch manager's office for Utah Construction and barns

Photos Vera Kochan

By Vera Kochan

With a history dating back to 1914, the red and white cluster of buildings along Moraga's School Street has become an unofficial landmark in the town. The first influential property owner was James Irvine from Southern California. The city of Irvine in Orange County bears his name.

Irvine's land purchase of more than 5,000 acres became The Moraga Company where agribusiness flourished from small farms to large-scale ranching and orchards. Irvine ran his empire much like a taskmaster. Tenant farmers were no longer allowed the freedom to use their land as they chose, but rather had to comply with his wishes.

Sharecroppers were instructed to plant peaches, corn, pumpkins, beets, tomatoes and beans. The Moraga Company's two most productive crops were walnuts and pears.

The Moraga Ranch and its buildings became a community unto itself. Employing nearly 150 workers during the peak planting and harvest seasons, while the remainder of the year offered jobs to ap-

proximately 45 workers to keep the ranch running during winter months.

Modern-day Moraga Ranch's well-known red buildings with white trims were not the original color scheme. Although no one is quite certain what the original color of the exterior buildings were, early photographs hint of an unpainted façade. Photos dating back to the 1940s and 1950s begin to suggest the appearance of the current coloring.

The ranch complex contained a variety of buildings and services to accommodate the needs of the small army of employees who worked the land. A cookhouse and commissary, cooler and mess hall, garage, blacksmith, carpenter shop, barns and stables, bunkhouses and bathing facilities were all located on site. A firehouse and an office were also part of the many buildings located within the small village. A walnuthulling shed is also still located across Moraga Way near the corner of School Street.

In August 1947, Irvine passed away while on a fishing trip in Montana. In 1953, trustees of his estate nearly

sold the Moraga Ranch to Donald and Richard Rheem, who would only agree to the sale if all of The Moraga Company's stock was included in the deal. One lone stockholder refused to sell his shares, thereby halting the purchase.

By the end of the year, Ed Wallace of Wallace Real Estate Company from Orinda was able to convince the stubborn stockholder to sell his shares in a deal that saw the entire holdings of The Moraga Company sold to Utah Construction and Mining Company.

Over the course of Utah's ownership, plans to turn the expansive acreage into subdivisions began; however the original Moraga Ranch buildings remained untouched.

The Moraga Ranch was destined to see yet another owner in 1964 when Utah sold it, and the 108 acres that would also include the Moraga Shopping Center, to Russell J. Bruzzone.

In the 1970s and 1980s Moraga Ranch buildings located along School Street included retail shops. Businesses such as Moraga Ranch Craftworks, Orinda Ballet, Moraga Food Company, Cook House Café, Country Store Antiques and Slick Chick Shoe & Shirt Shop occupied the edifices that once used to house the day-to-day workings of a bustling ranch and farm. Now known as the Ranch House Café, the former Cook House Café is the only remaining business still in operation.

The bright red and white buildings that once made up the heart of a bygone era when Moraga contained only a smattering of farm houses, yet produced a mighty haul of walnuts and pears, still evoke a feeling of nostalgia and pride in this town's roots.

(Research information provided by The Moraga Historical Society, Susan Sperry and Mrs. Joan Bruzzone.)



Worker bath house and toilets



Old firehouse building became Country Store Antiques shop

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Lamorinda residents participate in 24-hour global conversation about climate change

By Kara Navolio

Local climate leaders hosted events throughout the area Nov. 20-21 as part of a global event called "24 Hours of Reality: Truth in Action." The first ever global discussion about climate change was organized by The Climate Reality Project, a nonprofit headed by former Vice President Al Gore.

Co-chairs of the Bay Area Chapter of Climate Reality, Wei-Tai Kwok and Steve Richard, reported that there

were 100 presentations in the Bay Area, hosted by some of the 700 chapter members. Globally, in those 24 hours there were over 1,700 presentations in 80 countries and all 50 states. Richard hosted a discussion with fellow Climate Reality volunteer Nancy Hu at the Lafayette Library while Kwok spoke to the AP Environmental Science class at Las Lomas High School. Kwok also held two events at his Lafayette home where he shared the steps he has taken to electrify his entire home and eliminate the need for



Photo provided

Climate Reality Project volunteers organized 1,700 worldwide climate conversations on Nov 20-21, including four in Lamorinda, like this one at the all-electric home of Wei-Tai Kwok.

carbon-producing gas appliances. He and his wife recently did this in a 45-day project that cost about \$50,000 and included replacing all fossil fuel burning appliances like the HVAC system, water heater, fireplace and cook top.

Richard, a 20-year Lafayette resident, is now retired and dedicates his time to climate advocacy. "My involvement started as a family affair," Richard said. "We saw the movie 'An Inconvenient Truth' with our two sons. That inspired us to take on a project to cut our family's carbon footprint by half. It took us about five years to accomplish this. When a friend and I wanted to share what we did with others we set up a website, and that turned into Sustainable Lafayette." In 2015 he became a Climate Reality Project volunteer. Many of the Bay Area members, like him, were taught by Al Gore at trainings taking place twice per year across the U.S. However, it's not a requirement for membership in the Bay Area Chapter. Now he focuses much of his time on petitioning local governing bodies to make policy changes.

Lafayette resident Linda Flower and Moraga resident Dean Mayer, also trained Climate Reality volunteers, held a presentation and discussion at the Walnut Creek Library, which drew over 50 people. Flower, a former high school

science teacher, reviewed much of the science behind climate change and some of the effects we've seen increasing over the past 20 years like extreme heat waves, droughts, ocean levels rising, and extended fire seasons. But the pair also talked of the changes people are making and hope for the future. For example, in California 62% of new energy capacity came from solar and wind. Flower has been focusing her efforts on making people aware of their choices on their PG&E bill to use more clean energy. Residents of Lafayette and Moraga will see on their bills that part of their energy already comes from Marin Clean Energy, thanks to the cities adopting this 'light green' plan. Flower notes that MCE gets 63% of their energy from clean, renewable sources compared to PG&E, which only gets 33% from renewable sources. However, Lamorinda residents can do more. "There's an option on your bill to go 'deep green,'" said Flower. "This means you get 100% of your electricity from MCE. It's still billed through PG&E and nothing else changes. The average customer would only see about a \$5 per month increase." The easy switch takes only a phone call.

Mayer focused his discussion on what each of us can do to help make a difference.

Transportation is the number one polluter, not just cars, but also the transportation of goods. "In California it's one area where emissions are still increasing," said Mayer. "One thing we can all do is shut our cars off when we are waiting in line to pick up kids. It's estimated that unnecessary idling of cars generates 30 million tons of carbon dioxide each year. If we could eliminate unnecessary idling it would be the equivalent of taking 5 million vehicles off the road." He also suggested each person do their part to reduce their use of plastics, which are made from fossil fuels. "Scientists predict that by 2050 plastics in the ocean will outweigh fish," Mayer pointed out. "It's time to stop calling it climate change and start calling it a climate emergency." He also urges everyone to look at your investments. Are you supporting companies that invest in fossil fuels? Lastly, he says, "Vote! Vote for candidates with an environmental platform, at all levels from President to local leaders."

On Nov. 23, Kwok gave his 100th presentation since becoming a Climate Reality volunteer. "I have found (since beginning in 2013) that a lot of people care; it gives me hope that we will solve this problem in this generation."

For more information visit: climateralityproject.org.

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Cinderella at Town Hall Theatre for the holiday, an idiosyncratic fairytale



Photo Jay Yamada

Cinderella production four: Pictured: Henry Halkyard and Lindsay Kathryn Ford in "Cinderella: A Fairytale."

By Sophie Braccini

Humor, charm and wacky energy characterize the Brothers Grimm fairy tale staged by Town Hall Theatre this December. No damsel in distress, but a lovely young woman standing for herself. No prince rescuing the desperate, but a young man in search of authenticity and love. No fairy godmother, but the power of nature symbolized by birds giving those who understand it strength, and those who neglect it punishment. And above all a dynamic and super fun group of actors who give it all to make this play a very witty and memorable production. Disney it is not.

"Cinderella: A Fairytale," devised by Sally Cookson and Adam Peck, takes on the bias that Ella (Cinder-Ella) is not just a sweet and innocent girl, she has knowledge – of birds and the natural world – and power. She can be astute, she challenges the hardship that

has fallen upon to her; in essence, she is a fighter. This adaptation slightly warps the other characters as well, creating subtle discrepancies between memories we all have of the tale and what is presented here. This provides for tremendous amusement opportunities. Instead of two stepsisters you get a stepsister and a stepbrother; instead of a heroic prince you get a somewhat nerdy and awkward bird watcher.

These twists are played for maximum effect through Clive Worsley's direction. Worsley previously served as the artistic director at Town Hall and left in 2013 to direct the education program at Cal Shakes. He says that his return as the play's director was a treat and he added that he particularly loved that the main character uses her own power to transform herself, which is more fitting to our times. He also saw in that play an appeal to recognize and respect the power of nature.

Worsley mentioned that he had requested Dennis Markam to be in the cast. The mature and very versatile actor, who plays both the father and stepmother, is indeed at his best. Many newcomers were cast in the play with great acumen: Lyndsay Kathryn Ford as Ella is lovely, strong, full of youthful energy, and has an excellent voice to carry the charming tunes that are interspersed in the play; Henry Halkyard as the prince lets out a spontaneity in wackiness and awkwardness that works very well; Sarah-Jean Bartky is a completely hilarious and over-the-top stepsister, and she is very well matched by Marshall Scott who plays the stepbrother, sometimes a bully, and sometimes vulnerable and touching; Mikah Kavita as the queen is indeed magnificent and royal. The charming ensemble of the birds is played by five young actors ages 10-17 who never miss a beat. They flutter around the stage, sing, dance, and act with excellent professionalism.

Now be prepared, there is an element of cruelty in the original story alongside the whimsical reference to birds and nature, and the Cookson and Peck adaptation is true to that as well. Yet Markham's superb acting and having him cast as both the father and stepmother creates the distance that makes the cruelty more funny than shocking.

"Cinderella: A Fairytale" runs through Dec. 21 at Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School St. in Lafayette. For tickets and information, visit www.townhalltheatre.com



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Travel log

Almost lost in Laos



Indeed, Buddha was smiling down upon me as I raced the clock.

Photos Nick Marnell

By Nick Marnell

My nonchalance and carelessness finally caught up with me after decades of travel.

In Vientiane, the capital of Laos, on Thursday night, Nov. 28, a thug sped by me on a motorbike and ripped away my travel bag. The bag, which I held in my left hand, contained my passport, credit cards, cell phone, about \$300 and my Kindle.

I turned around in shock. "No way!!? Did this really just happen?" But the thief was long gone. All I had was about \$25 left to my name, which I had stashed in my pocket.

I know I should have ... blah, blah, blah. But I couldn't spend time on what should have happened. Or why it happened. Or feeling sorry for myself. I had a problem and it needed fixing.

I used part of that \$25 to go back to the hotel. A compassionate woman at the front desk let me use her phone and I canceled the two credit cards. That took until about 11 p.m., and then I went to bed. A restless sleep, but I was plotting my strategy as I tossed and turned.

In the morning, a guy from the hotel staff drove me to the U.S. embassy, about five miles away. The guy behind the window, a young fellow from Washington D.C. on the job 13 months in Laos, was helpful but not very encouraging. "You need to pay for a replacement passport. Then you need to go to the immigration police for a report, which you then take to the Lao consulate for your visa stamp. It could take days. And this is Friday, before a national three-day weekend."

He understood I was broke, but his hands were tied. He needed \$145 for the replacement passport before he could do anything.

The kid let me use the embassy phone, and it took two hours before AMEX approved a cash advance for me. But only through Western Union. The embassy uses MoneyGram, so that took more time to sort out. Because of that glitch, the kid drove me to the WU office and

vouched for me, and I got my money.

It's now 12:30 p.m. Stop for passport photos, and I started getting antsy as the photographer insisted on photoshopping my picture. Good grief! I kept staring at the time on my iPad, the only device I had not taken out of my room Thursday night.

Back to the embassy. "Wait out here, Mr. Marnell." And I waited. And waited. In a most inhospitable, austere room with that phone and a guard. Nine teller windows, with the blinds down, and rows of white plastic seats. After forever, the fellow popped his head out the teller window. "Our printer is being fixed." And the kid told me that this was never going to work out, because of the succeeding steps I needed to take. I had to prepare to stay here three extra days - till Dec. 5 - because the government offices would be closed until Tuesday since Monday, Dec. 2, was Laos Independence Day. And me, with not enough cash, no phone, and no credit cards.

I thought about having to cancel my flight, schedule a new one, get a hotel ... and no obvious way to do it. But I stopped dwelling on what might be and refocused.

No way was I giving up. At 1:45 p.m. the embassy kid finally gave me the replacement passport and directions to the immigration police.

My driver dropped me off at the consulate instead of the police. A gruff older guy at the consulate told me I had to get that letter from the immigration police to bring to him, but he was leaving early for the holiday weekend. Just great.

The police were two miles away, and it was 2:30 p.m. The immigration building resembled an old wooden two-story schoolhouse. A friendly, talkative immigration official rushed me through a process that he said could take up to three days ... in one hour! He must have felt my pain. I ran out of his building with my signed police report.

At 3:30 p.m. I'm counting my blessings, but I am

not out of the woods yet, not by a long shot. The immigration police report was one thing, but without that exit visa in my new passport, I still cannot leave the country.

I got back to the Laos consulate at close to 4 p.m. The man I needed to see was "in a meeting." Seriously?

So I waited. Was the "meeting" a cover for his early exit? I went out to the street and bought a bottle of water. It was 92 degrees-hot outside. Back to the old dilapidated consulate office, 4 o'clock hit. Then 4:15. Then rustling on the stairs. My heart jumped. It was him!

He wasn't impressed when I showed him the immigration paperwork. He took my police letter, grabbed my passport and told me to wait out in the lobby on either a wooden bench or a torn black vinyl chair.

The clock was ticking and I still had no visa. Was he the kind of lazy public official who would just leave that paperwork on his desk and split on Friday? The clock ticked to 4:25.

A minute later, the wooden door creaked open. "Nick Marnell! Come in here!"

My heart sank. Was something wrong? Was I going to be stuck three more days in the country? Was I going to be sent to jail?

"Here. And be careful." He handed me the passport book, which contained my exit visa, and nodded his head.

And that was it. My exit visa, at practically the last possible second. The guy's exterior gruffness apparently belied his genuine caring. I wondered if he came back from that "meeting" just for me.

Imagine how you would feel. Alone in a (very) foreign country, almost all of your personal items gone, relying on total strangers to help you pull through. And they do. Sure, most of them were paid to help, but each one seemed to have gone over and above their basic job requirements.

Did I learn anything? Probably not about being less careless and cavalier.

But this experience did confirm my feelings about the overall goodness of humankind.

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Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church



CHRISTMAS EVE
5 PM Family Service
9 PM Candlelight Service

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ART
Irenka Kudlicki & Dalia Alekna at Samadian Gallery through December at 23 Orinda Way, Suite 301, Orinda. The exhibit includes engaging abstract paintings by Irenka Kudlicki and alluring pastels by Dalia Alekna. Valley Art Gallery presents its 54th Annual Holiday Collection for Artful Giving through Dec. 28. Their holiday collection includes a wide variety of jewelry, ceramics, glass, textiles, holiday decorations, small paintings, and many other one-of-a-kind gifts crafted by

greater Bay Area artists. In addition, unique sliding walls feature over 300 works in a variety of styles, media and prices by the best Bay Area artists. 1661 Botelho Drive, Suite 110, Walnut Creek. Website and telephone: www.valleyart-gallery.org; (925) 935-4311
Art Show "Radiance Captured, Oakland Art Association, Painted Bottles & National Parks, Where Nature Runs Free," Art Gallery at the Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way, Orinda. The Lamorinda Arts Council presents the oil paintings by Judith Feins, 2D and 3D

artwork from members of the Oakland Art Association, painted wine bottles by Kath Balamuth and nature-rich photography by Farzeen Taban during the month of December. Visit lamorindaarts.org for more information.
Lamorinda Arts Council presents "It's Kind of Eclectic" from Linda Huffman through December at the Art Gallery at the Art & Garden Center at Wilder at 20 Orinda Fields Road in Orinda. <https://lamorindaarts.org>

MUSIC
Solo Opera presents a collaboration with Macy's Concord, a fundraiser for their season, entitled The Twelve Days of Christmas at 10:30 a.m. on Dec. 14. The event will include breakfast treats, a concert of opera and holiday music featuring soprano Diane Squires, a fashion show, a sing-along, and 12 enter to win prizes. All proceeds benefit Solo Opera, a local nonprofit opera company and their 2020 season. Tickets - \$22 at Eventbrite.

WomenSing presents The Light of Hope Returning at 8 p.m. on Dec. 11 at Saint Andrews Presbyterian Church 1601 Mary Dr., Pleasant Hill and at 4 p.m. on Dec. 15 at Temple Sinai 2808 Summit Street, Oakland. \$10-\$28. Tickets: <https://lightofhopepleasanthill.brownpapertickets.com>; <https://lightofhopeoakland.brownpapertickets.com>

The singing and ringing choirs of Our Savior's Lutheran Church present their annual Christmas concert at 4 p.m. on Dec. 15. "Faith, Fun, and a Feast" includes a little religious Christmas music, a lot of popular Christmas music, and ends with "A Feast of Carols," composed by Randol Alan Bass for the Dallas Symphony and Symphony Chorus. 1035 Carol Lane in Lafayette; free admission/freewill offering taken, with half the proceeds going to Contra Costa Interfaith Housing, helping the homeless find permanent homes.

THEATER
Town Hall Theatre Company presents "Cinderella: A Fairytale" through Dec. 21 at 3535 School Street, Lafayette. For times, tickets, and prices: BOX OFFICE: (925) 283-1557; www.townhalltheatre.com

Celebrate the holiday season with The Peter Pan Foundation's original holiday show, "Twas the Opening Night before Christmas" Dec. 14 and 15 at Diablo Valley College, 321 Golf Club Rd. Pleasant Hill. This seasons production includes a cast of more than 100 performers ages 8 to adult. Its original story and music tells the heart-warming story of love, hope and holiday cheer the whole family will enjoy. Tickets are \$25 for adults; \$15 for youth 18 and under. For tickets and showtimes visit www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4421286.

KIDS, PARENTS & TEENS

Packets for TK-5 Registration for the next school year, 2020-21 are now available at your neighborhood elementary school. Registration for Lafayette students entering TK and kindergarten for the 2020-21 school year begins Jan. 13. Additional information can be found at www.lafsd.org. In addition, an informational presentation, "A Roadmap to Kindergarten" will be held from 6 to 7 p.m. on Jan. 9 at Lafayette Elementary, Multipurpose Room at 950 Moraga Road for all interested parents. This presentation is for parents only.

Come to 5A Rent-A-Space, 455 Moraga Road in Moraga from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Dec. 14 with your children for a Visit with Santa. Be the Star You Are!® volunteers will be on hand to help kids write a letter, and take their photo with St. Nick. Crafts and treats included at this free event. For more information visit: www.bethestaryouare.org/events

Breakfast with Santa Benefit for Lafayette Historical Society from 8:30 to 10 a.m. at Sideboard Lafayette. Advanced reservations are required and cost \$29 for adults and \$20 for seniors and kids age 12 and younger. To book your tickets and for more info, go to: www.localfoodadventures.com/breakfast-with-santa

Join Mindful Littles at White Pony Express for their Family Volunteering Program from 1 to 2:15 p.m. on Dec. 15 and from 4 to 5:15 p.m. on Dec. 17 at 3380 Vincent Rd #107 Pleasant Hill. White Pony Express is one of Mindful Littles' nonprofit partners, "working to eliminate hunger and poverty by delivering the abundance all around us to those in need." Bring water and any snacks needed for your kids. Please also wear comfortable clothes. Programming is for families with kids 4-12. Register at: <https://mindfullittles.org/events/>

... continued on next Page

Lamorinda's Religious Services

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www.willowspringchurch.com
 1689 School St. Moraga | 925-376-3550
Sunday Service 10:45 am

Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church
433 Moraga Way, Orinda, 254-3422
www.holyshepherd.org

 9:30 a.m. CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP
 10:30 a.m. Coffee Fellowship in the Center for Ministry
 visit <http://www.holyshepherd.org> for more details

ST MARK'S CHURCH OF ORINDA & MORAGA
Sunday Service at 10 a.m.
 451 Moraga Way, Orinda
www.stmarksorinda.org | (925) 254-5965
All Are Welcome

St Stephen's Episcopal Church
 66 St. Stephen's Drive, Orinda
 254-3770. www.ststephensorinda.org
 Sunday 8am, 10am

St. Anselm's Episcopal Church
 An Open, Affirming & Loving Community
Sunday Services: 8 and 10 AM
In-church Youth Zone, 10 AM Nursery Childcare
 682 Michael Lane, Lafayette, 284-7420, www.stanselms.ws

ORINDA Community Church
 Christmas Eve Service
 December 24, 5:00 p.m.
 Orinda Community Church
 10 Irwin Way, Orinda
www.orindacommunitychurch.org
 • **Sacred Music**
 Presented by our many amazing choirs, featuring soloists and musicians from the greater Bay Area
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 Informal Wednesday Meeting 7:30 - 8:30 pm
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www.christianscienceorinda.org

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Mass times:
 Saturday - Confessions 3:30 - 4:30 pm and Vigil Mass 5:00 pm
 Sunday - Masses at 7:30, 9:00 and 11:00 am
 Daily Mass Monday-Friday 9:00 am
 Coffee and donuts following the Sunday 9:00 am Mass.
Advent / Christmas Season:
December 15 - Pancake Breakfast in the Peace Room following the 9:00 am Mass. All are welcome!
Christmas Eve / Christmas Day Mass Times:
December 24 - 4:00, 6:00, 8:00 pm (8:00 pm with choir)
 Christmas Carols at 7:30 pm
December 25 - 9:00 & 11:00 am (11:00 am with choir)
January 1 - 10 am Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mass

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Lafayette United Methodist Church
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 11 p.m. Traditional Candlelight Service with Candles, Choir and Message
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JOIN US FOR OUR SUNDAY SERVICE AT 9:30 AM
CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAMS AT 10:45 AM

Not to be missed

Not to be missed

Not to be missed

OTHER

Free movie screening in Orinda Theatre Square "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" at 7 p.m. on Dec. 12. The Griswold family's plans for a big family Christmas predictably turn into a big disaster. Donations are appreciated, and help sustain the program and benefit the charity, the Makey Foundation.

Lamorinda Village's 5th Annual Afternoon of Gratitude will be held from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 13 at LOPC, 49 Knox Drive in Lafayette. We will gather to celebrate with our members, volunteers and community supporters another

great year of serving the older adults in our community. Refreshments, entertainment and a special Volunteer of the Year Award in Honor of Ed Stokes will be presented. For more information on Lamorinda Village please go to www.lamorindavillage.org

Friends Corner Book Shop in Lafayette is having a half-price sale from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Dec. 14. This is a wonderful opportunity to find some last-minute treasures for your holiday shopping bag! The Book Shop has a wide variety of gently used books for all ages, and half-off our already low prices is a real bargain. Proceeds benefit the Lafayette Library.

<https://www.lllcf.org/shop-for-a-used-book/>

Hospice East Bay's Tree of Lights ceremonies have offered community members a way to honor the lives of friends and loved ones. This year's last ceremony is at 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 15 at Moraga Country Club, 1600 St. Andrews Drive. For further information about these special events, visit Hospice East Bay Tree of Lights.

Graduate Student Jennifer Lehmann closes out her three-part lecture series with a discussion of the ways pop culture is saturated with themes and stories traditionally reserved for the religious adherents of

the major western religions; Including the wine shelf at Trader Joe's in Lafayette labeled "water." Part of the ongoing Sunday Morning Forum series from 10:45 to 11:45 a.m. on Dec. 15, Creekside Chapel, 1035 Carol Lane. <http://www.oslc.net/>

Winter Solstice Event at 6 p.m. on Dec. 21 at Outdoor Courtyard, 1035 Carol Lane, Lafayette. Fire Arts Performance, poetry, candlelight, original music by singer/songwriter Laura Zucker, warm drinks for adults and kids, all to mark the longest night of the year. Free to the public with donations welcome as we pause and honor the turn toward the

sun. <http://www.oslc.net/>

Toys for Tots - Partnering with the Moraga Police Department, 5A is a collection site for your donation of a new unwrapped toy or a cash through Dec. 22. 5A is located at 455 Moraga Rd. Ste. F. in Moraga

5A's "Santa's Secret Room" will be open through Dec. 24 with free wrapping paper, tape and ribbon to wrap your gifts. 5A is located at 455 Moraga Rd. Ste. F. in Moraga. (925) 643-2026.

Please submit events to: calendar@lamorinda-weekly.com

Soft and chewy chocolate cookies a perfect holiday treat



Photo Susie Iventosch

By Susie Iventosch

Whether you are planning a Hanukkah celebration, a treat to leave for Santa Claus, or a cookie exchange this holiday season, your crowd will love these chewy, crinkly, dark chocolate cookies! The first time I ever had them I was in second or third grade. It was my turn to bring snacks for my Brownie troop and my mom sent me with these tasty morsels. We have been making them ever since, but nowadays we use dark chocolate, which makes them even

better. Because these cookies have very little flour, they are chewy and soft when they come out of the oven, so it's best to bake them on parchment paper. It makes the job of removing them from the baking sheet so much easier. Once baked and cooled, these cookies store well for several days in an airtight container. I haven't tried this yet, but I am going to add chocolate chips to the batter one of these days to make double-chocolate Brownie Drops. If you get around to trying this before I do, please let me know how it turns out!

Brownie Drops

(Makes about 2 dozen)

INGREDIENTS

- 8 ounces bittersweet chocolate (I use Trader Joe's Dark Chocolate)
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup finely chopped pecans and/or walnuts
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 F. Place a sheet of parchment paper on top of baking sheet. Melt chocolate and butter together in a small sauce pan, stirring occasionally, until melted. Remove from heat. Meanwhile, beat eggs until very foamy. Gradually add sugar and continue to beat until very thick and shiny. Blend in cooled chocolate mixture. Add dries and mix well. Stir in nuts and vanilla. Drop by tablespoonful onto the parchment paper and bake for approximately 8-10 minutes, or until done, yet soft. Cool completely before removing from parchment. Store in an airtight container ... if you have any left over!

You can find most of the recipes published in the Lamorinda Weekly on our website. Food tab: www.lamorindaweekly.com/html2/food1.html

Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.



The 6 Top Mistakes high school students make applying to college

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

With college admissions deadlines looming, the following are a list of six top mistakes high school students make when applying to college:

1. Not balancing your college list by admission probability is a recipe for disappointing results. Reach schools have low and very low admit rates; they are competitive schools where many talented students are denied admission. Limit these to a couple of schools on your college list. A solid selection of four to six target schools is vital to good admission results (targets are those colleges where your GPA and test scores fall within the mid 50% of applicants and you are on track with other admission requirements, like having a strong set of extracurricular activities). For students with weaker profiles, the list should include some anchor schools—these should be schools that you would be happy to attend where your academic profile places you in the top 25% of applicants. Some colleges offer guaranteed admission for a given GPA and test score. These are great anchors, if you qualify. Once your list is balanced you can rest easier.
2. Not setting aside enough time to complete your college applications. Manage your time so you are doing some work on your applications each week through the fall. It helps to set up an application timeline. Get your EA and ED (if you are applying early) school application completed, then move on to the next set of applications. The final set of applications may be completed after winter break.
3. Neglecting to preview (read aloud) your application before submission. This is a critical step that helps to ensure

that all your perfected essays and the carefully constructed activities section get sent to the admission staff the way you intended for them to be seen.

4. Applying to too many colleges. This may permit the college to boast record numbers of applicants but leave you feeling frazzled. Even worse, you are adding to the frenzy of college admission by making it harder for colleges to predict who will accept offers of admission. So colleges respond by trying harder to assess student interest and increasingly ask for students to list all colleges they are applying to. This leads to longer waitlists because colleges see the students' long lists and are uncertain of students' intentions. They accept those who indicate strong, consistent interest with a shorter, more cohesive set of schools on their list and may put others on the waitlist.

5. Stealth applicant is a phrase coined by college admission officers to describe students they have never heard of until the application appears. The school may regard you as having little genuine interest and reject or waitlist you. Looking at two students with similar credentials, the one who demonstrated interest is more likely to be offered admission. Although some colleges clearly state that demonstrated interest is not a factor in the admissions decision, for a large number of very popular, highly selective schools, this strategy was likely adopted to protect the admissions office from a bombardment of emails from students trying hard to show lots of interest in order to up their chances of admission. The difference is the strength and quality of the student's profile. If your profile is consistent with the qualifications of a school's accepted applicants, showing interest by visiting campus, scheduling an inter-

view, sitting in on a class, applying for additional scholarships, attending local information sessions and writing for more information that is not easily accessible on the college's website is well worth your time investment.

6. Waiting until the last minute to ask for teacher recommendations. This can backfire when the teacher must decline your request, because they have many requests and have set a limit on the numbers they will write. If they do agree to write for you, they might write a hurried recommendation. Give your teachers enough time to write a complete and thoughtful recommendation letter. Be sure to thank them for their effort on your behalf!



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD personally guides each student through each step of selecting and applying to well-matched schools for undergraduate and graduate school study. Over the past two decades, Elizabeth has placed hundreds of students in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. The number of clients taken is limited to ensure each applicant has personalized attention. Contact Elizabeth early in the process to make a difference in your outcomes. Write elizabeth@doingcollege.com; Visit www.doingcollege.com; or Call: 925.385.0562.

Service Clubs Announcements

Lafayette Rotary Club

Step in on a Thursday and join us for our lunch meeting.
Thursday at noon Oakwood Athletic Club, 4000 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette.

<p>December 12: David Gerson and Rachel Zinn Information about a proposed school board parcel tax</p>	<p>December 19: Kimberly Lam with Republic Services "Trash Talk"</p>
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www.rotarylafayette.org
www.facebook.com/Rotary-Club-of-Lafayette-CA

Lamorinda Weekly

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The Lamorinda spirit in action



2018-19 Lamorinda Spirit Van drivers

Photo provided

Submitted by Mary Bruns

Now in its 14th year, the Lamorinda Spirit Van Program provides rides for Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda older adults Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. thanks to volunteers, drivers and dispatchers who serve the community.

Thanks to community donations and grants, Lamorinda residents aged 60 and over who need transportation to appointments, errands, shopping, classes, social visits, and/or lunch at the C.C. Café/Walnut Creek Senior Center, can call (925) 283-3534 from 1 to 4:30 p.m., to make your ride reser-

vation and get answers to questions.

"It's the sweet simple things of life which are the real ones after all," participant Virginia Stuart said of the program. "What a big difference your kindness makes! I use the Spirit Van a lot. What a blessing it is for me."

Residents interested in volunteer driving can call (925) 284-5546. If you would like to make a donation to the Spirit Van program, tax-deductible checks can be made payable to the City of Lafayette and mailed to: Lamorinda Spirit, Lafayette Community Center, 500 Saint Mary's Road, Lafayette, CA 94549. (Please write Lamorinda Spirit on the memo line.)

Breakfast with Santa Benefit for Lafayette Historical Society, Dec. 15



Photo provided

Santa at last year's "Breakfast with Santa" event with, from left: Maggie Conklin and Lafayette Historical Society advisory board members Laura Torkelson, president Mary McCosker, Lauren Herpich and Larry Blodgett.

By Lauren Herpich

It seems as if Thanksgiving were just yesterday, but since there are only three short weeks between the turkey and the tinsel, it's not too early to say that Santa Claus is coming to town ... and this year, he's staying for breakfast. Back for the second year, the Lafayette Historical Society is hosting its Breakfast with Santa benefit on Sunday, Dec. 15 from 8:30 to 10 a.m. at Sideboard Lafayette.

Perfect for anyone who wants more than just a wait in line for that quick photo-op with the big guy, guests of the breakfast will enjoy a private meet-and-greet with Father Christmas as well as special off-the-menu pancakes served alongside gourmet hot cocoa, and a choice of freshly squeezed orange juice or pour over coffee courtesy of Sideboard, which is the home to Lafayette's original Pio-

neer Store, opened in the early 1860s by Benjamin Shreve, Lafayette's first school teacher.

"This is such a perfect way for multiple generations to come together during the holidays, enjoy the spirit of the season and learn more about the city's past while celebrating the sugarplum dreams of our community's future," said Mary McCosker, president of the Lafayette Historical Society – the keeper of the city's artifacts, ranging from indigenous people's arrowheads, town founder Elam Brown's lantern, and more than 2,000 photographs, news clippings, maps and oral histories.

All guests gain a year's membership to the Lafayette Historical Society and access to a silent auction of items donated by local Lafayette businesses. Last year's breakfast raised nearly \$1,200 for the organization, which takes in 100% of the proceeds.

Advanced reservations are required and cost \$29 for adults and \$20 for seniors and kids age 12 and younger. To book your tickets and for more info (including a video of last year's event and dietary accommodations), go to: <https://www.localfoodadventures.com/breakfast-with-santa>.

Girls Crushing It winter pop-up show, Dec. 15



Photo provided

A Girls Crushing It member showcases her wares at last year's event.

Submitted by Emily Best

The Second Annual Girls Crushing It Winter Pop-up Shop, which will showcase 60 local "girlpreneurs" proudly presenting everything from their homemade bath products and pet treats, to original works of art and handmade jewelry, will return from 2 to 5 p.m. Dec. 15 at the Lafayette Community Center.

Special guest and prominent Bay Area author Diana Kapp will also be on hand signing copies of her new book for young women, "Girls Who Run the World: 31 CEOs Who Mean Business," an ideal addition to this event since it profiles successful entrepreneurs in areas of business ranging from fashion and food to construction and tech. The stories of these female CEOs from companies such as Stitch Fix, Soul Cycle, Wildfang and Glossier relay their failures as well as their triumphs and share words of advice, all of which are sure to inspire readers to become the leaders of tomorrow.

"I wrote this book in part to encourage my own teenage daughter to pursue her passions and when girls

read a whole book of stories about relatable, imperfect women who create products that sell in the billions they start imagining themselves doing that too," said Kapp. "Girls Crushing It is an invaluable organization that not only shows young girls the power of possibility but is also a celebration of their entrepreneurial prowess."

Roxanne Christophe, founder and CEO of Girls Crushing It said, "I am delighted to bring the Winter Pop-up Shop back for another year. These girls are growing in confidence and with authors such as Diana Kapp enlightening them to a world of possibilities, they can truly see they can be the CEOs and business leaders of the future."

In addition to the pop-up shops, Girls Crushing It runs business workshops where the girls learn the fundamentals of entrepreneurship – everything from product development and pricing to marketing and developing their sales pitch. They also learn the importance of budgeting, investing and giving back.

Suggested donation to Girls Crushing It is \$20 per family/household. Donations benefit Girls Crushing It.

Moraga Junior Women's Club Hoedown huge success



Photo Anita Bicskei

Back row, from left: Janel Kidd, Kingsley Frazier, Angela Munoz, Lauren Knight, Stephanie Wraight, Lindsey Carr, Erika Lamoreaux; front row: Anna Nestler, Dawn Novak, Lyndsey Gilmore

Submitted by Kingsley Frazier

The Moraga Junior Women's Club hosted the 5th Annual Hometown Hoedown Nov. 16 at the Jennifer Russell Building. The Ripplers provided the entertainment for the evening while guests ate BBQ and danced the night away. Beer was provided and poured by Canyon Club Brewery and guests could participate in a whiskey tasting. A silent auction and raffle raised money for Court Appointed

Special Advocates of Contra Costa County. The mood was set with lighting by Desired Effect and the memories were captured by Anita Bicskei and Oh Snap It Photo Booth. Special thanks to sponsors: Village Associates, Kurt Piper Group, Diablo Magazine, Mechanics Bank, Secret Garden Landscapes, Desired Effect, Canyon Club Brewery, Moraga Rotary, Bloom West, Donisi Landscape Construction, Humble Yoga, Mountain Camp, and Efficiency Matters. For more information about joining MJWC, please email membership@moragajuniors.org

Community Service:

We are pleased to make space available whenever possible for some of Lamorinda's dedicated community service organizations to submit news and information about their activities. Submissions may be sent to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com with the subject header In Service to the Community.

Share Your Celebrations and Remembrances

If you would like to share an announcement about a special event or achievement, such as a wedding, engagement, scholarship or graduation of a local resident, or about a special person from Lamorinda who has passed, send a photo along with your text (up to 250 words) to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com, and include "Celebrations and Remembrances" in the subject line.

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Campolindo girls and boys win state Division III Cross Country Championships



Courtesy of Hector Chao

The Campolindo girls and boys cross country teams celebrate with their state championship trophies. Pictured: Dylan Mitchley, Jack Pieper, Emma Smith, Zoe Theulier, Ellie Guthrie, Sophie Webster, Ellie Buckley, Cayden Hein, Quinn Guthrie, Dylan Gunn, Dylan Cronin, Owen Lekki, Alicia Hober, Paloma Hancock, Alex Lodewick, Rhys Pullen

By Jon Kingdon

For the fifth time, the Campolindo girls have won the state cross country championship while the boys team made it a clean sweep with their first state title. In the Division III state meet, the girls came in as one of the favorites to take the title while the boy's team was seen in more of an underdog role. Still, it was a goal that the Cougars had been pointing toward all year, said head coach Chuck Woolridge: "This is the first year where we started with the understanding that both teams had the opportunity to win the section and state titles and that is very rare. I can't think of the last time that I had a squad that started in July and already thought about the state championship as a realistic goal."

Despite coming in second to Maria Carillo (28-53) in the North Coast Section, which qualified Campolindo for the state meet, the boys team had their best performance of the year at the state meet, competing against 25 teams, said Woolridge: "The boys team really performed beyond our expectations. We knew that we would have to have a magical performance to win and that's what they did."

As much of an individual sport as cross country is, a team can only be as strong as its lowest qualifying runner. Each of the Cougar runners set personal records in this 5K meet, which was held at Woodward Park in Fresno. In the team competition, Dylan Gunn finished in fourth, Dylan Cronin finished in seventh and Alexander Lodewick, Cayden Hein and Owen Lekki finished in 11th,

12th and 13th respectively. Despite having the first two finishers in the race, the final three runners for Maria Carillo placed 10th, 15th and 36th, landing them in second place.

It was a team concept that led to the victory, said Woolridge: "We used a pack strategy to counter Maria Carillo's top runners. Our boys fed off the momentum of the group and worked as a team. All five of our runners were in the top 20 for the entire race with only a 29 second margin between our No. 1 runner and our No. 5 runner, which at this level is pretty incredible."

The teams were running under ideal conditions, according to Woolridge: "It was cool with overcast skies with the course being dry but packed which made for fast times. Our boys understood what each of their roles was going to be and we really got great performances out of our No. 4 and No. 5 runners, Hein and Lekki. Cayden showed great improvement from his NCS time as he was more conservative in the first mile and was able to hold up in the last mile."

"The state meet was more like a dual meet between us and Maria Carillo," said Hein. We were not the favorites because we had lost to them at the NCS but we ran hard with passion and peaked at the right time. As a team we positioned and executed well and I really pushed harder because it was the last meet of my last season. Coach Woolridge and (assistant) coach Andy (Lintquist) did a great job in training and motivating us through the season and kept reminding us that we had never won the boys

state title."

The qualities of each of the victories for the boys and girls were different, said Woolridge, who has been the head coach for four of the girl's state titles: "The girls went in as the favorite to win the meet and they performed like the favorite having their best race of the season with the margin of victory being one of the largest the state meet has ever seen (74 to second place Cathedral Catholic's 154) and that was a thrilling and gratifying thing to watch

because I know how hard they worked, and the pieces that had to come together took the entire season."

Like the boy's team, all of the Campolindo girls set personal records led by senior Paloma Hancock who finished in fifth place and set a personal record of 18:04.7, bettering her previous best time by 41 seconds (ninth fastest in Campolindo history). Freshman Ellie Buckley 18:19.1 (11th fastest in Campolindo history) placed ninth, senior Alicia Hober 16th, senior Emma Smith 19th and Zoe Theulier 25th.

It was the first year running cross country for Smith and her performances all season were crucial to the team, said Woolridge: "Emma was a catalyst for the team. Knowing that we had another legitimate point scorer coming into the season as the fifth athlete that we could count on, really made a difference for the girls." Not to be overlooked was the leadership by the team's seniors, Hancock, Hober and Ellie Guthrie.

Acalanes head coach Jeff Hutson saw his boys team finish in 13th place in Division IV in the state tournament after having finished in second place at the NCS tournament. Still it was cause for celebration, said Hutson: "I believe it's been about five years since a whole squad of boys or girls from Acalanes went to state and it was a big accomplishment for us. We had pointed to the NCS meet and going to state was the icing on the cake. We just missed putting the candle on top of the cake."

Sam Roth led the team

finishing 23rd, followed by Andrew Owens 48th, Loic Windfuhr Durand 72nd, Nick Hutson 89th and Dominic Balsaldua 89th.

With five of the seven Dons runners being underclassmen, Hutson is very optimistic for next season. Junior Sam Ross who finished in 37th will be a key on the team next season, said Hutson: "Sam's becoming one of the leaders on our team and I'm very proud of how he's stepping up. Loic finished at 16:55.1 and that was a good accomplishment, going under 17 minutes. Andrew, who will be graduating this year, ran very consistently and had a good run."

Junior Nicole Frigon was the only qualifier for the state tournament from the Acalanes girls and finished in 66th place, competing against 211 other runners. Frigon qualified for the state tournament by finishing in 11th place at the NCS tournament, just beating out sophomore teammate Lauren Yee by 1.6 seconds. "Nicole did well running a personal best time of 19:41.9," said Hutson. "She got consistently faster during the season and we're pleased with that."

The Miramonte girls team finished in 12th place in Division IV at the state meet. The team was led by junior Audrey Allen who was first team all NCS finished in seventh followed by sophomore Kate Riley in 41st place, sophomore Clare Nolet in 72nd place, senior Jamie Say in 84th place and sophomore Nathalie Green in 130th place.

Correction: In the Nov. 27 article, "Acalanes girls, Campo boys win NorCal Championship," the Acalanes women's water polo team had won 54 straight games, as opposed to the 57 stated, and the final NorCal Championship game against Sacred Heart was won with a score of 10-2 with Jewel Roemer scoring 4 goals, not 3.

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Lamorinda boys basketball teams abound (and rebound) with optimism



Scott Ruegg



Carter Mahaney



Matt Meredith

Photos Gint Federas

By Jon Kingdon

With the onset of the basketball season, the boys teams in Lamorinda are all heading into the 2019-20 season with their heads held high. Campolindo's is certainly the highest, coming off their state championship. Miramonte defeated Campolindo prior to their playoff run and Acalanes closed the season with two key victories.

Campolindo

Campolindo has won three of their first four games but head coach Steven Dyer is well aware that "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown" (Shakespeare-Henry IV) but there is nowhere else he would rather be: "We do have a target on our back this year. Everybody knows who we are and everybody in our league is going to want to beat us. We've talked about it a lot and how we have to be better mentally than the teams in the past."

Dyer proudly describes himself as a defensive coach and with the graduations of David Ahazie and Jake Chan, it is a major concern for him so far: "We're still trying to figure the roles for our players and replacing Ahazie, who was our best defensive player and Chan who was also a good defensive player, is something that we need to do. Carter Mahaney is our best defensive player so far and we're still searching for other players that can defend well."

There was a delay in the roster reaching full strength as Rex Curtis, Cole Curtis and Max Weaver were still involved in

the playoffs with the football team.

The team will be led by Carter and Aidan Mahaney, both of whom made first team all-league last season. Carter has already committed to attend and play for the University of Northern Arizona next season. "Carter totally deserves this and has worked very hard to get to this point," said Dyer. "Now he can totally focus on his senior year."

Mahaney has continued to elevate his game as evidenced by his scoring 23 points in the Cougars' opening game. Besides his stellar play on the court, Dyer is also looking for Aidan to step up as a leader.

Matt Radell, who was honorable mention as a freshman last year, and junior Emmanuel Callas should continue to provide the size up front. Chase Bennett, who was a 46% three point shooter last year, is again going to be counted on for his outside shooting. Sophomore guard Cade Bennett (Chase's brother) and forward Tyler Smith, both promoted from last year's JV team, "have stepped up and will have roles on the team," said Dyer. The one freshman on the team, Logan Robeson is a top shooter and should contribute as well to the Cougars' offense.

Dyer welcomes the difficult games in preparation for the post season tournaments: "We raise the bar with the tournaments against good teams that will really challenge us. We're not better than last year's team yet. We have a lot of talent and we have to see how it meshes.

We're a work in progress."

Miramonte

In his first year as Miramonte's head coach, Chris Lavdiotis, who brings a wealth of experience with him, having last coached at Lowell High School and for a number of years at Piedmont High School, has been won over by his players: "It's a coach's dream. They're great kids that work very hard and are very coachable. These guys are very close. The strength of our team is its togetherness."

Lavdiotis describes his offense as heavily motion based, freedom with structure that demands a lot of trust in the players reading each other and the defense: "We're pretty traditional with four out motion and some five out components to it. It's not read and react. I'm teaching the team to space and move without the ball, cut and screen and play together which gives the players a lot of freedom. The players are really smart and they have picked things up quickly and are running it pretty well."

Leading the offense are senior co-captains Matt Meredith and junior Niyi Olabode. Meredith, who was first team all league and averaged 15.6 points last season, had 25 points, 11 rebounds and five assists in Miramonte's opener. Lavdiotis has been equally impressed with Olabode's talent and versatility: "Niyi can play anywhere on the court from point guard to the high post where he can really attack the rim." The 6'5" Olabode had 12 points, seven rebounds and six assists in the

Matadors' opener. Olabode will primarily be playing the wing with junior Ryan Schwarz and sophomore Tyler Dutto being the team's point guards. The other team's co-captain, senior Quenton Breznikar is another scorer on offense that is being counted on. "We have a lot of guys that can put the ball in the basket," says Lavdiotis.

Lavdiotis wants "an athletic defensive team which we can hang our hats on. You have to stop the opponent. We're a pack line defense where we are playing gaps rather than areas of the court. The goal is to take away the paint first and force contested 2-point shots. It's a real good team defense and once our players learn how to trust each other and apply pressure to the ball and are in the proper position, it can be really effective.

"We're not like the biggest bruisers," said Lavdiotis. "We're pretty aggressive and the physicality is there and they're pretty tough kids. It's all a work in progress."

Acalanes

After winning their final two games last season, Acalanes now has a six game winning streak, starting off this season with four straight wins. After losing only one of their top six scorers to graduation (Ian Archer), head coach Sol Henik is excited about his returning players.

"It's great that we have most of our players returning, led by our junior captain Scott Ruegg. He's a great leader that brings the team together. He's the first guy at practice and his

enthusiasm and spirit on the team is contagious. He cares about the team, the school and his own game and has put in the time and effort to get the most out of this year."

Two freshmen, 5'6" point guard Theo Stoll and 6'6" Jake Davis are already seeing playing time for the Dons. "Theo is not big but he is so shifty and herky-jerky, it is hard to stay in front of him," says Henik. "He is crafty and sees the floor really well and has been a great addition to the team. Jake has a very good basketball IQ and a really good touch around the rim with a good outside shot. Not only is he a good rebounder, he is a really good outlet passer. He gets the rebound and gives it up to the proper guard. All fall they have competed and earned their spots on the team."

Henik has been very welcoming to the football players that have come over since their season ended: "Joey Carillo, Jackson Aris-Dumas and John Kalil all came in with a winning mentality after a successful football season and they bring an added brand of toughness."

Rebounding is a concern that should be addressed by the football players, says Henik: "We really have to test ourselves and be mentally and physically strong on every defensive sequence to make sure that the other team does not get the offensive rebound."

Co-captain, Aidan Bodner, is the only senior that will be starting this year. "Aidan plays with so much heart, hustle and energy," said Henik. "He will get point just on pure hustle."

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Lamorinda girls basketball teams continue to raise the bar



Lauren Kobashigawa

Photo Gint Federas

By Jon Kingdon

The Lamorinda girls basketball teams have all gotten off to excellent starts to their seasons. With a combined record of 13-2, Miramonte (4-0), Acalanes (5-1), and Campolindo (4-1) have already established themselves as teams not to be overlooked.

After going independent last season, Miramonte finished the season with a 28-4 record, making it to the second round of the state tournament. With a schedule that will send them to Wyoming, Nevada and Oregon, head coach Kelly Sopak has a mature, experienced and confident team to take on all comers.

"We've got a lot of seniors and juniors now and you can see the whole evolution of their progress. They're just out there enjoying it a little bit more and not worrying about the small stuff," said Sopak. "Our four years of tough scheduling is

paying dividends, so the girls don't get too high and don't get too low. On the court, they know they have a job to do and regardless of the score, they have time to do it."

Some things never change. Miramonte will press all over the court on defense, continue to push the ball up the court and use his entire roster. "We use all our players. If they're on the varsity, they have to be able to play," says Sopak. "With so many games, you need players to finish it off and give the starters a rest and those are important minutes for those kids to play. They all have the green light to shoot. We want them to stay aggressive."

There is more size on this team, says Sopak: "Our post play has really improved. P.K. Hall was a substitute last year. Nikki Lynch is a rugby player who came up from the JV and is going to get big minutes along with Chloe Breznikar, who also

came up from the JV."

The point guard position is being handled by senior Rebecca Welsh, whose 3-point shooting skills may break Sabrina Ionescu's career record this year. She is being backed up by senior Mykaangela Mambandos. Says Sopak: "She had limited playing time last year but this season she has come along really nicely."

Leading the offense are seniors Erin Tarasow and Leah Sopak, along with juniors Junior Mia Mastrov who is already receiving some Pac 12 offers and Jordan Allred who has committed to the University of Idaho.

Sopak is taking a long-term perspective on the season: "It's going to be interesting to see how we develop because we have a very tough schedule with the games and all of the tournaments that we are playing in. In the end, our record will probably show a lack of improvement. My hope is that those games will propel us to getting used to those games leading to the post season."

Acalanes

After a 17-8 record last season and only losing one player to graduation, the Dons have a mature, veteran team that head coach Michelle Sasaki is very familiar with: "I think that there is a comfort zone with our continuity. We don't have to start from scratch and go over things as much so we're able to get to more things and layer it on top of what we already built upon. That is definitely an added plus."

Despite only having a roster of nine players, this is still a luxury for Sasaki since she had games last season where there were only six or seven girls available to play. "The players are all familiar with my offense and defense which means that I can move the bar up so they don't get too complacent and just dial it in. We want to climb up another rung and keep ascending the ladder. This is a team with some very good talent and depth."

Freshmen Emily Du and Isabella Aris-Dumas are getting playing time and cutting their teeth on varsity players. Says

Sasaki: "They came to all of the open gyms we had in the fall and that proved to be very fruitful for them as they showed a genuine commitment to the team and the game, improving a lot which made it a viable opportunity for them to be on the varsity."

The team is led by senior and league MVP Kaylee Pond, who Sasaki calls "our Swiss army knife because she does everything. She can play the 1 through 5 and will do so at various times."

Junior first team all-league player Lauren Kobashigawa and second team all-league Lauren Frechman are the team's two starting guards.

Grace Gebhardt, also first team all-league is the leading force in the front court, says Sasaki: "Grace has phenomenal hand-eye coordination and she is a competitor. She understands the game and she wants to win. I like her fiery competitiveness and you will see her on the inside and the outside."

With only nine players on the roster, everyone should find playing time and the goal is to avoid any injuries.

There is a real advantage in the Dons' schedule in that, outside of tournaments, the team has 14 home games and only five road games. "For the last two years, we've been road warriors and now it's payback time," says Sasaki. "This year we have those teams coming our way. It's been a long time coming."

Campolindo

Last year, it was a learning experience for first year head coach Matt Kirby and his Campolindo players. In his second season, it's a lot more comfortable situation for Kirby: "The returners from last year are a little more experienced. Last year, we were a lot of new faces getting used to varsity basketball and this year it feels like we belong on the court. I see a lot of improvement from our returners and the new girls on the team. We're where we want to be, but we can get a lot better. I have a better idea of what we have and what we need to do."

The Cougars have started

off this season winning four of their first five games. Last season, they did not win their fourth game until the 12th game of the season.

With only four seniors, this is still a very young team, which includes one sophomore and three freshmen. Kirby is counting on two of those freshmen, Camille Yabu and Allie Korth: "They are nonstop players. They have played a great deal of basketball on their club teams and have the ability to step right in as wing type players. Our third freshman, Ava Garcia, is a multiple sports player and is a very good athlete and a fighter who should contribute as well."

Still it's the upperclassmen that Kirby is relying on: "Our team will go as far as our upperclassmen will take us. Everybody really gets along with each other, which is not always the case with freshmen. Still, our freshmen played a lot with us in the summertime and are very good players."

Leading the team are co-captains Kate Brown and Olivia De Paschalis. "Olivia leads by example. She is always there giving great effort and has battled through some injuries. Kate brings the most experience to the team as our point guard. She has become a good leader and the kids respect her."

The front court is headed by junior Kiana Thorson, who was honorable mention all-league, along with senior Emily Marsten, junior Meg Larsen and freshman Allie Korth.

For Kirby, depth is the key to the team's success: "I know what I will get from our top players. The 4-5-6 rotation is the group that we are going to need to get contributions from as the season develops."

The one tournament that Kirby was personally looking forward to is the Paris Twins Classic Tournament at Piedmont High School on Dec. 12-14 where Kirby played for three years under Miramonte Boys head coach Chris Lavdiotis: "It's always nice for me to go back as I have had a lot of history with the city and it will be good to play on a court that I had played on so often."

The Saint Mary's men's soccer team finishes another great season



Photo provided

Submitted by Melanie Moyer

The Saint Mary's men's soccer team finished another impressive season this year with their second West Coast Conference win and a 7-0 winning streak. This marks another historic season for the team, for they haven't won every game within their conference in fifteen years. Their success comes in the wake of last year's accomplishments when they carried a 6-0-1 winning streak to win the West Coast Conference for the first time since 2011, resulting in a cumulative record for the last two seasons of 34-2-2. The soccer team's past two seasons have held noteworthy accomplishments for both the team and the school, for winning back to back West Coast Conference titles hasn't happened in the past 12 years. This success within the conference also sent them to the NCAA tournament for the second year in a row. The team came into competition with players from 24 other conferences from around the country, putting our small school on the map of the soccer world.

Hosting an NCAA tournament game is an impressive accomplishment for any Division I sports team to make. The Saint Mary's soccer team

has hosted tournament games two seasons in a row, becoming the first Saint Mary's sports team to bring the NCAA tournament home with them. This is due to their placement within the tournament's standings, for the soccer team was seeded within the top 15 of the tournament. In 2018, Saint Mary's was seeded No. 8 and in 2019 No. 12. In comparison to past qualifying seasons where the team was ranked in the range of 80-100, this is a major accomplishment.

This sudden improvement of the team can be attributed to many different factors. The improved coaching staff has made a big difference in the abilities of the team. Head coach Adam Cooper has coached the team for 14 seasons, with all titles won under his guidance. This season, the West Coast Conference named Cooper Coach of the Year. Further, the team's roster has proved to be very fruitful, with players hailing from around the world. About 11 of the players have international backgrounds, most coming from Germany, New Zealand, Italy, and other European countries. However, it is the team's defensive effort that has yielded the accomplishments they have today. The numbers speak for themselves, for the team was only scored on twice within their conference this season and only

scored on once in 2018. Further, in 2018, their defense conceded the least goals in America. Other accomplishments include the naming of their scoring offense as fourth in the country and their goal assists as 11th. For reference, these rankings are out of 204 teams in the country. Also, in the All-WCC awards, several players were recognized for their playing abilities. Anders Engebretsen was named West Coast Conference Co-Player of the Year for his offensive achievements, having scored 16 goals this season. Filippo Zattarin was named Defensive Player of the Year and Remi Prieur was named Goalkeeper of the Year.

This sudden shift in the team's accomplishments has impacted fans and players alike. Valentin Sponer, a junior on the soccer team, reflected on his team's change since he was a freshman with amazement. When Sponer was a freshman, their statistics were 6-6-5, a number that dwindles in comparison to his sophomore and junior years. During his freshman year, he recounted that the team was unbeaten at home, but their success on the road was a different story. Their hard work on the field did not seem to be transferring to their performance when they left their home grounds. Having witnessed the shift in the team's abilities firsthand, Sponer noted that the team's cultural change was the most significant improvement. They grew a mindset where their games both home and away took precedence over everything else, making them take both their practice and their performance more seriously. This included a greater emphasis on spring training during the off-season, as well as high expectations for all the players. The shift resulted in a more aggressive team on the field, for Sponer describes that the players took pride in and wanted to maintain their ability to keep their opponents from scoring on them. The away games were taken more seriously by all of the players, putting them on a more direct road to victory.

The cultural change to Sponer also existed in the team's dynamics. Their arrival to campus three to four weeks before the rest of the student

body had a huge impact on the player's relationships with each other. They bonded over this period of practice called "Captain's Practice," where coaches are not allowed to take part in the team's practicing by NCAA rules. During this time, the freshmen and players that live on campus lived with the other members of the team, sometimes resulting in two-bedroom apartments being shared amongst five or six soccer players. After these student-athletes were allowed to move on campus, most chose to reside with teammates in the college dorms. Besides their living situations, players also bonded over the dinners the team hosted every other night. During these dinners, freshmen volunteered to sing for their teammates or took part in other fun activities. Last season, older players convinced the freshmen that "Corn Hole" was a game in which they had to eat corn on the cob faster than their fellow teammates. To Sponer, this bonding off the field made a significant difference in the overall playing of the team.

Sponer also described Saint Mary's atmosphere as having a significant impact on the team. Other top 10 schools have huge student populations and big soccer programs. However, since Saint Mary's holds such a small student population, Sponer finds it to be a more humbling program. He finds that he is not treated differently than others by faculty and fellow students alike. After achieving such great accomplishments as a team, they're often greeted with little recognition or acknowledgment by other students, so players can feel like regular students during their studies and team practices. This, Sponer says, pushes them all harder to perform as a team. However, in the future, Sponer hopes to raise awareness for the team's success, especially because of their increase in accomplishments. After winning the West Coast Conference and qualifying for the NCAA tournament two years in a row, the Saint Mary's Men's Soccer team is expecting both a higher interest in their team from fans and students, as well as another successful season next year.

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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian ... read on Page D8

Alert: Protect yourself from yellowjackets on the rampage



By Cynthia Brian



Felipe from Contra Costa Vector Control dressed for eradication.

Photo Cynthia Brian

When we think of yellowjackets, we normally associate these pesky stingers with interrupting barbecues, picnics, and outdoor festivities during the summer months. What most people don't realize is that yellowjackets are the most aggressive during late autumn to mid-December. These wasp-like, six-legged, black and yellow flying pests are found anywhere throughout the United States wherever humans commune. Although they are pollinators, they eat meat, fish, and sugary foods. They are also attracted to perfumes and sweet smells.

At this time of year, larvae in the cells mature into males and females who mate. For this reason, the workers are diligently protecting the nest and will attack with a vengeance anyone that comes near. The nests are usually in a hole in the ground, in a bush or at the base of a tree, although they will build nests in attics or other living spaces. If you are raking leaves and inadvertently come close to an area where a yellowjacket nest resides, a swarm of stinging scavengers will chase you, stinging repeatedly, sometimes causing dire allergic reactions. When we brush off or kill these insects, they release a pheromone that signals other yellowjackets nearby to attack. They are extremely territorial and if the nest is not exterminated, the fertilized eggs that hatch into queens in the spring will create a new nuisance ... many more colonies of these pests. The workers will die when the weather turns extremely cold and the queen goes into hibernation.

If you detect a swarm of yellowjackets, call either an extermination company for a paid service or Vector Control for free extermination at (925) 685-9301.

Remedies for yellowjacket stings:

Because yellowjackets are defending their colony, they can be very aggressive and dangerous.

If you or your pet is allergic or are stung multiple times, seek medical assistance immediately. Besides the pain, swelling and itching, a large quantity of venom can cause nausea, fever, vomiting, fainting and anaphylactic shock. Delayed reactions, such as encephalitis, that occur weeks after a sting are rare but do occur. Contact your physician.

For immediate treatment of mild stings using a home remedy, make sure the stinger is not embedded in the skin. If you are outside, apply a compress of cold mud. As soon as possible do any of the following:

... continued on Page D4

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6 Southwaite Ct, Orinda
86 Hillcrest Dr, Orinda
1 Culver Ct, Orinda -tenant
3 Lucille Way, Orinda
289 Camino Pablo, Orinda - tenant
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7 El Toyonal, Orinda
6 Camino Del Cielo, Orinda
12 Spring Rd, Orinda
14 Oak Rd, Orinda

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408 Tharp Dr, Moraga
3 Lucille Way, Orinda
12 Jack Tree Knoll, Orinda
634 Francisco Ct, Walnut Creek
1 Culver Ct, Orinda - tenant
285 Camino Pablo, tenant

**Happy
Holidays****Lamorinda home sales recorded**

City	Last reported	Lowest amount	Highest amount
LAFAYETTE	10	\$990,000	\$2,855,000
MORAGA	6	\$390,000	\$2,120,000
ORINDA	12	\$900,000	\$1,934,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal REsource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California REsource. Neither Cal REsource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

LAFAYETTE

1191 Crestmont Drive, \$990,000, 4 Bdrms, 2966 SqFt, 1979 YrBl, 10-22-19,
Previous Sale: \$626,000, 04-22-98
506 Mcbride Drive, \$1,189,000, 4 Bdrms, 2253 SqFt, 1965 YrBl, 10-25-19
3235 Mt Diablo Court #203, \$2,020,500, 41753 SqFt, 2017 YrBl, 10-23-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,750,000, 07-25-05
1261 Panorama Drive, \$2,855,000, 5 Bdrms, 5497 SqFt, 1989 YrBl, 10-28-19,
Previous Sale: \$2,700,000, 08-28-07
405 Read Drive, \$1,458,000, 4 Bdrms, 1918 SqFt, 1958 YrBl, 11-01-19,
Previous Sale: \$345,000, 04-01-91
3366 Ridge Road, \$1,070,000, 2 Bdrms, 1561 SqFt, 1950 YrBl, 10-31-19
3561 South Silver Springs Road, \$2,090,000, 4 Bdrms, 2104 SqFt,
1956 YrBl, 10-31-19, Previous Sale: \$315,000, 08-01-86
531 Silverado Drive, \$1,615,000, 5 Bdrms, 2152 SqFt, 1962 YrBl, 10-28-19,
Previous Sale: \$995,000, 06-26-08
3298 Sweet Drive, \$1,250,000, 3 Bdrms, 1375 SqFt, 1954 YrBl, 11-01-19,
Previous Sale: \$850,000, 10-21-15
1226 Warner Court, \$1,385,000, 3 Bdrms, 2004 SqFt, 1952 YrBl, 10-21-19,
Previous Sale: \$847,000, 04-16-14

MORAGA

122 Ascot Court #D, \$390,000, 1 Bdrms, 858 SqFt, 1970 YrBl, 10-23-19,
Previous Sale: \$214,000, 07-20-01
1939 Ascot Drive, \$811,500, 2 Bdrms, 1379 SqFt, 1973 YrBl, 10-21-19,
Previous Sale: \$725,000, 05-11-15
35 Carr Drive, \$1,405,000, 4 Bdrms, 2419 SqFt, 1973 YrBl, 10-21-19,
Previous Sale: \$433,000, 06-01-91
122 Danefield Place, \$1,400,000, 5 Bdrms, 2800 SqFt, 1978 YrBl, 10-21-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,420,000, 03-27-17
12 Josefa Place, \$890,000, 2 Bdrms, 1845 SqFt, 1984 YrBl, 10-22-19,
Previous Sale: \$505,000, 02-08-11
227 Los Santos Court, \$2,120,000, 3 Bdrms, 3408 SqFt, 2018 YrBl, 10-25-19

ORINDA

73 Ardilla Road, \$1,335,000, 4 Bdrms, 2350 SqFt, 1955 YrBl, 10-29-19,
Previous Sale: \$910,000, 04-03-18
65 California Avenue, \$1,340,000, 4 Bdrms, 1365 SqFt, 1956 YrBl, 10-21-19,
Previous Sale: \$850,000, 03-20-18
78 Coral Drive, \$1,500,000, 4 Bdrms, 2023 SqFt, 1961 YrBl, 11-01-19,
Previous Sale: \$675,000, 10-13-00
23 Crestview Drive, \$1,125,000, 3 Bdrms, 1830 SqFt, 1950 YrBl, 10-24-19
41 Diablo View Drive, \$1,570,000, 3 Bdrms, 2764 SqFt, 1960 YrBl, 10-28-19,
Previous Sale: \$700,000, 04-13-00
15 Easton Court, \$1,365,000, 4 Bdrms, 2115 SqFt, 1959 YrBl, 10-31-19,
Previous Sale: \$236,500, 04-01-88
36 Heather Lane, \$1,030,000, 4 Bdrms, 2923 SqFt, 1979 YrBl, 10-31-19,
Previous Sale: \$570,000, 11-17-98
59 Stanton Avenue, \$1,200,000, 3 Bdrms, 1611 SqFt, 1940 YrBl, 10-23-19,
Previous Sale: \$820,000, 10-29-04
9 Valley Court, \$1,600,000, 4 Bdrms, 2875 SqFt, 1984 YrBl, 10-24-19
10 Van Ripper Lane, \$1,425,000, 4 Bdrms, 1928 SqFt, 1951 YrBl, 10-28-19,
Previous Sale: \$1,145,000, 05-29-08
5 Wanda Lane, \$900,000, 3 Bdrms, 3101 SqFt, 1987 YrBl, 11-01-19,
Previous Sale: \$630,000, 09-06-11
21 West Hill Way, \$1,934,000, 4 Bdrms, 3016 SqFt, 2017 YrBl, 10-30-19,
Previous Sale: \$24,440,000, 12-23-15

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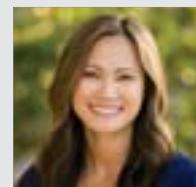
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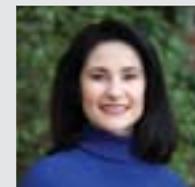
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Alert: Protect yourself from yellowjackets on the rampage



Photo Cynthia Brian

Yellowjacket stings caused swelling in this reporter's hand.

... continued from Page D1

1. Take an antihistamine according to package directions.
2. Hold an ice pack covered in a thin cloth on the area.
3. Make a paste of baking soda and water and apply to affected areas. The alkalinity in the baking soda neutralizes the venom.

4. A cotton ball application of undiluted ammonia, vinegar or toothpaste works in the same manner. The acid in vinegar reduces swelling and inflammation.

5. Two or three aspirins can be crushed and mixed with water to make a paste to apply to the stings. The anti-inflammatory properties will assist in the control of swelling and pain.

6. Spread honey on the stings to reduce pain and itching. Leave on the skin for 30 minutes before rinsing with warm water. Reapply as necessary.

Remember that yellowjackets are not bees. They are wasps. Don't confuse the two.

Cynthia Brian is the author of Growing with the Goddess Gardener and the Digging Deep columnist for the Lamorinda Weekly. www.CynthiaBrian.com



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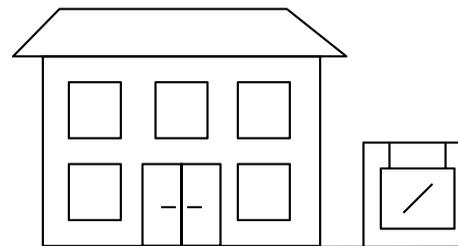


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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian 'Tis the Season



Photo Cynthia Brian

As the temperatures drop, the colors become more intense with a grand finale of fall foliage on the Japanese maples.

By Cynthia Brian

"Down came the rain and washed the spider out!" - Toddler song

Halleluiah! It is raining ... and raining, and raining. It was indeed a blessed Thanksgiving weekend as the heavens finally opened and lifegiving tears spilled from the sky. Our grounds have been so parched that even the amended clay soil is as hard as cement. The start of the rainy season means it is time to get garden work completed.

On the first day of rain, I donned my rain gear to fertilize the lawn and reseed the grass with my homemade "lawn patch." The recipe is simple: In a wheelbarrow or 5-gallon bucket, mix potting soil with lawn seed. Sprinkle the combination in areas where your lawn is bare, making sure that there are at least 20 seeds per handful. Since the patch needs to remain moist to stimulate growth, doing this chore when it is raining is optimum.

On the second day of rain, I realized that this was not a light shower, but the beginning of a deluge. As soon as there was a break in the weather, I cleaned patio furniture, moved lounge pads to storage and wrapped the furniture in plastic to endure the winter under a patio cover. Large containers of birds of paradise and palms that are frost tender were transported to protected areas.

After three days of continual downfall, it was time to plant my bulbs and transplant perennials. The bulbs had begun to sprout and as I dug holes, I realized that about 5 inches down, the earth was still very hard and dry. Rain ... we will need so much more.

... continued on Page D11

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Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December

SAVOR the final days of fall foliage on your deciduous trees. As the temperatures drop, the colors become more intense, especially on maples, crape myrtles, liquid ambers and pistache.

STOMP mole runs to encourage those burrowers to move on.

PRUNE euphorbia to the ground or if it has become invasive, dig out the roots.

BE ALERT for yellowjacket nests in the ground. Call Vector Control for eradication. (925) 685-9301.

REPURPOSE Thanksgiving gourds by spray painting them in metallic colors of gold silver, bronze, copper, red, green or blue. Use in your holiday décor.

MAKE your own Christmas wreaths and garlands with boughs from your redwood, cedar, pine, or other conifer trees. Add berries of holly, cotoneaster, Chinese pistache or pyracantha for a homemade creation.

DON'T mow your lawns when it is raining. Wet grass bends over and you'll end up with uneven cuts. Also, mowing when your lawn is soaked will cause ruts, compaction, and even uproot the grass.

SEASON wood for at least a year before burning in fireplaces or wood-burning stoves. Green wood is heavy and smokes, doesn't provide heat, and can build up large quantities of creosote which can cause a fire in your chimney. Have your fireplace and chimney inspected and swept at least once per year. Enjoy a fire only on safe days, never on spare-the-air notifications.

NEVER burn oleander wood. The smoke is toxic and poisonous. Never use oleander as skewers for meat as this practice can be deadly. Place cut oleander branches in a plastic bag and put it in your trash bin. Remember that all parts of the oleander can be fatal to humans and animals.

ADD a whimsical statue to your garden to bring a smile to your guests during inclement weather.

PLANT bulbs for spring.

CLEAN rain gutters. Add the debris to your compost pile.

SCATTER poppy and lupine seeds.

COME to 5A Rent-A-Space in Moraga on Saturday, Dec. 14 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. with your children for a Visit with Santa. Be the Star You Are!® volunteers will be on hand to help kids write a letter, and take their photo with St. Nick. Crafts and treats included at this free event. For more information visit: <https://www.bethestaryouare.org/events>

PICK Meyer lemons to add zest to your celebratory menus.

COMBINE containers of Christmas cactus and cyclamen for a pretty holiday display.



Let firewood and kindling dry for several months before burning.



Christmas cactus and cyclamen make festive holiday bedfellows.



As beautiful as the flowers of oleanders are, the entire plant is poisonous.



Freshly picked Meyer lemons will add zest to holiday menus.

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

'Tis the Season



Decorate with cuttings of cotoneaster, magnolia, and redwood leaves.

... continued from Page D8

On day four, I was raking the piles of colorful liquid amber leaves when I felt a sting in my leg. Then another shot of pain whisked through my jacket to my arm, followed by

my neck feeling on fire. Before I knew what had transpired, I was attacked by a swarm of yellowjackets. What? Yellowjackets in December? After tending to the painful and swollen sites with ice, a paste of baking soda and water, vinegar, and imbibing antihistamines, I called Vector Control. The rain needed to stop to effectively treat and destroy the nest. What I learned is that yellowjackets are the most aggressive at this time of year because the queen is laying eggs that will become more queens in the spring (see story on Page D1). Be cautious when raking, digging or pruning.

When day five arrived, I was ready to start my Christmas decorating. I cut branches from my redwood trees, clipped Chinese pistache, cotoneaster and pyracantha berries, sprayed painted my autumn gourds, and started creating holiday arrangements.

We had a morning of sunshine on day six so I pruned the deadwood from my fence perimeter oleanders. Don't let the pretty

flowers fool you. Although these Mediterranean specimens are easy to grow in almost any climate, every part of the oleander is poisonous to both animals and humans. Wear leather gloves when working with oleanders as the sap can cause severe allergic reactions and clean shears with bleach. Do not add the flowers, leaves, or branches to compost piles. Dispose of them to your trash secured in a plastic bag.

Day seven dawned dark, dreary, cold and wet. It was time to bring in my weathered wood, make a cup of hot cocoa, light a fire and read a book. Growing up on the farm without central heat, our only source of warmth in winter was a roaring fire. 'Tis the season to be jolly and cozy!

The rain continues to wash the spiders out!

Happy Holidays! Happy gardening!
Happy Growing!



Santa Cynthia is ready to celebrate the season.

Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, raised in the vineyards of Napa County, is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!® 501 c3.

Tune into Cynthia's StarStyle® Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com.

Buy a copy of her books, Growing with the Goddess Gardener and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store.

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\$669,000

WALNUT CREEK

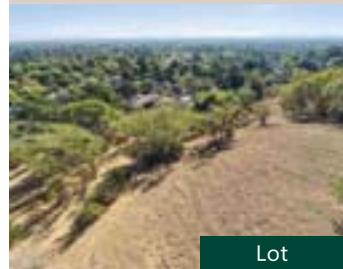


1670 San Miguel

Spacious 2 bed/ 2.5 condo w/ remodeled kitchen, hardwood floors, & oversized master w/ large closet.

\$699,000

PLEASANT HILL



Lot

20 Whitfield Court

Great parcel at top of knoll with views of Mt. Diablo. Ideal for privacy. Investment opportunity!

\$1,375,000

The Village Associates:

Ashley Battersby
Patricia Battersby
Shannon Conner
Meara Dunsmore

Linda Ehrich
Emily Estrada

Joan Evans

Linda Friedman
Dexter Honens II

Anne Knight
Susan Layng

April Matthews
Hillary Murphy

Karen Murphy
John Nash

Altie Schmitt

Judy Schoenrock

Ann Sharf

Amy Rose Smith

Molly Smith

Jeff Snell

Lynda Snell

Steve Stahle

Clark Thompson

Angie Evans Traxinger

Ignacio Vega

Ann Ward

Jenny Lyons Wilhite

Margaret Zucker

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Village

ASSOCIATES

It's Village. Of Course.

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