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Former city manager makes a statement at the LLLC



"Red Letter" displayed in the LLLC permanent collection

Photo, and artwork, by Steve Falk

By Nick Marnell

Few artists want to explain the meaning of their work, or what it represents, leaving those answers for the public to determine. On that note, "Red Letter," the exhibit submitted by Steve Falk for dis-

play in the permanent collection of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, will challenge the public for years to come.

Falk served as Lafayette city manager for 22 years before he departed in 2018. "We wanted to recognize his

contributions to the city," said Erling Horn, chair of the city Public Art Committee which, together with the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, offered Falk an intriguing parting gift: the opportunity to display a piece of his artwork on the mezza-

nine wall at the LLLC.

"At first I was intimidated by the scale – 13 feet high by 9 feet wide," Falk said. "But then I thought about what I wanted to accomplish. My main goal was to stimulate conversation."

From that goal arose "Red Letter." Falk prepared sketches for the art committee, the committee made suggestions and the city council greenlighted the project this past summer.

Falk, whose garage doubles as the art studio in his Lafayette home, had been working on the series of red objects for several years, and so the car, ice machine and phone were ready to go before the project started. He built the rest of the exhibit around those items. That powerful shade of red – cadmium red, medium hue – a color that Falk has favored for years, works especially well on a neutral background, he said.

But there is not much else neutral about the acrylic-on-canvas exhibit. Falk imagines a parent and a 7-year-old walking up the mezzanine stairs and the child asking if the bottom right-hand "Red Letter" element is a Stop sign or a Go sign. "In my mind, people

will react to this in different ways, and develop their own sense of what the message is. Art can be decorative, provocative or both," Falk said. "That's what I was going for."

Of the six elements of his exhibit piece, Falk provided an explanation for only one of them: the white Red Letter painted on a red square, which he said alludes to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," a book featuring characters who lived out of the mainstream. "And libraries are collections of books," Falk said.

Is that what "Red Letter" itself symbolizes – elements out of the mainstream? What about the three items pictured – obsolete by today's standards. Does Falk's piece presage the obsolescence of today's technology? And the Maximum segment? Why is there a red line above the word? Why would Maximum be impeded by a hovering ceiling?

Falk prefers that the public come to the LLLC, check out his exhibit and question his work themselves. "If people are asking questions, it might change their perspective on the world," Falk said. "And that's what libraries do."

Lafayette in good financial shape as the city rolls into the next decade

By Nick Marnell

Shortly before Steve Falk departed as Lafayette city manager, he urged the city council to increase its reserve balance target from

60% to 100% of general fund expenditures, with the intent to reach that target in five years. "The likelihood of a recession in the next several years is increased because this very long period of eco-

nom expansion cannot persist. A recession that reduces sales and property tax revenue could result in deficits," Falk advised the city finance subcommittee in 2018.

For the last fiscal year, recently memorialized with the release of the 2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, the city made a significant jump in the direction that Falk recommended.

Lafayette finished 2019 with \$17.8 million in general fund revenue against \$14.2 million in operating expenses. The city closed with \$10.8 million in its general fund balance, an operating surplus that the city can use for nearly any reason, like stabilizing tax rates, addressing revenue shortfalls or funding emergencies. That \$10.8 million equaled 77% of general fund expenditures, an increase over the 68% of the previous year and on its way toward the professed goal of 100% by 2023.

With a net position of \$135 million, only \$3.6 million in long-term debt and enough cash to cover more than nine months of operating expenditures in its general fund balance, Lafayette

appears to be in a good position to fend off areas of financial concern. According to the CAFR, those concerns include a deficit in the Stormwater Pollution Fund, maintenance of public roads to an acceptable pavement condition index and increased legal fees, mostly due to the defense of land use lawsuits brought by residents and developers.

Of note in the just-concluded fiscal year is the internal report from the city auditor, Maze and Associates of Pleasant Hill. It was not so much what was in the report, but what was not, according to Jennifer Wakeman, assistant administrative services director. "The auditor could find no significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in our internal controls," Wakeman said. "It was the first time in five years there was no schedule of recommendations in the audit report, and we are very proud of that."



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<p>Lafayette Public Meetings Monday, Jan. 6, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.</p> <p>City Council Monday, Jan. 13, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.</p>	<p>Planning Commission Monday, Jan. 6, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.</p> <p>Design Review Monday, Jan. 13, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center, Arts & Science Discovery Center, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.</p>
<p>School Board Meetings Acalanes Union High School District Wednesday, Jan. 15, 7 p.m. AUHSD Board Room 1212 Pleasant Hill Road, Lafayette www.acalanes.k12.ca.us</p>	<p>Lafayette School District Wednesday, Jan. 15, 7 p.m. Regular Board Meeting Stanley M.S. Library 3477 School St., Lafayette www.lafsd.k12.ca.us</p>