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Volunteers spearhead collaborative push to test seniors at all Lamorinda residential facilities

By Pippa Fisher



From left: De'Janae Gideon, Dr. Armando Samaniego, Dr. Brian Candell, Vice Mayor Susan Candell, Dr. Yenjean Hwang, Crystal Mendes, Anna Callanta before heading into Merrill Gardens to test residents and staff May 1. Photo Pippa Fisher

access to this testing too," says Candell.

Contra Costa County has begun offering free testing to all residents but, in order to expedite testing to seniors for whom attending a drive-through site or clinic is not feasible, the testing initiative is hugely appreciated.

The first facility tested was Merrill Gardens in Lafayette on May 1. General Manager Aubrey Goo expressed his deep appreciation for Dr. Hwang and Dr. Candell for performing the tests so quickly: "The support of these physicians means the world to us."

And in Merrill Gardens the news was good, with all but three tests that needed redoing completed.

"We are pleased to report that all of the 124 tests that were administered to residents and team members came back negative for the virus," says Goo. "In addition, a resident who had previously tested positive on April 26 has now tested negative for the virus."

Goo says that while this gives peace of mind, they remain vigilant in the fight against COVID-19. "Our Enhanced Resident Protection Protocol remains in place at the community."

Orinda Vice Mayor Amy Worth, who is leading the project like Candell as a private citizen in Orinda, echoes the sentiment of gratitude for the initiative and especially the generosity of the community. She also acknowledges the immediate response by OCF President Sue Severson in getting the fundraising up so quickly.

Lafayette City Manager Niroop Srivatsa who was present as the doctors and their assistants went into Merrill Gardens says that it was a privilege to see them walk into the facility with their kits to test the residents and staff members.

"Everywhere in Lafayette," says Srivatsa, "people are stepping up to help each other and this great endeavor by local doctors and nurses is no exception. #LafayetteStrong."

To donate to this joint initiative, residents should visit the Community Foundation websites:

Orinda Community Foundation website: <https://orinda2010.wixsite.com/ocfwebsite>

Lafayette Community Foundation website: <https://lafayettecf.org/>

Moraga Community Foundation website: <https://moragacommunityfoundation.org>

Under the leadership of Lafayette Vice Mayor Susan Candell, acting as a private citizen, volunteers are expediting COVID-19 testing for some of the most vulnerable across Lamorinda in all residential senior living facilities.

What started as a Lafayette initiative, as Candell worked with her husband, Dr. Brian Candell of the Orinda Medical Group, his partner Infectious Disease Specialist Dr. Yenjean Hwang, and Dr. Armando Samaniego of Lafayette StatMed, in conjunction with County Health Director Chris Farnitano to test all residents and staff at the three facilities in Lafayette, has now expanded to Orinda and Moraga.

Candell is working with the Lafayette Community Foundation to raise the \$17,000 needed for the initiative in the city and is excited to report that the Orinda and Moraga Community Foundations are also fundraising for the testing in Orinda and Moraga.

"Many of our senior residents in Lafayette are low and very-low income, so we need to make sure they have

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