

Published June 10th, 2020

Residents gather for peaceful protests amid pandemic

By Pippa Fisher and Sophie Braccini



Campolindo High School Counselor Patrick Turner addresses a packed Plaza Park at a protest June 7 in Lafayette. Photo Pippa Fisher

The anger and frustration of a nation, triggered by the recent death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, has been evident even in the sleepy Lamorinda suburbs. Several peaceful protests were held in Lamorinda last week, with the largest on June 7 in Lafayette, featuring speakers who called out the racism they say they regularly experience in the schools and community. Earlier protests had led to rioting and looting in neighboring Walnut Creek, and the mayors of all three Lamorinda cities had declared states of emergency, and had reached out to community members for calm.

In Lafayette Mayor Mike Anderson addressed the city June 1 in a Facebook Live broadcast, taking a few moments to address the historical aspect of prejudice towards people of color, and reminded the community of its shared humanity. "There is a challenge that requires all of us to reach a little deeper into our sense of humanity," he said.

Noting that he had met with Police Chief Ben Alldritt and City Manager Niroop Srivatsa, Anderson said that the freedom of speech would be protected and would be ensured. To keep the community safe he said that the police would be increasing staffing, and that while people would be allowed to protest and assemble peacefully, violence and criminal activity such as was seen in Walnut Creek would not be tolerated.

"Let's go forward and try to be a beacon for our region and maybe even for the nation for how a community can in fact live together, work together and support each other everyday," said Anderson.

In a letter to the community Orinda Mayor Darlene Gee also expressed sadness and outrage at the murder of George Floyd and so many other victims of racial injustice, and in Moraga an official message from the town manager and the Chief of Police was issued via Nixle.

Protests continued to pop up across Lamorinda. One of the first was a car caravan May 31 from Acalanes High School.

News of the gathering spread by word-of-mouth, and within a short space of time the parking lot at the school was completely full, and still more cars were lining up to join in.

With signs and messages denouncing the killing of George Floyd and support for Black Lives Matter, the procession drove along Mt. Diablo Boulevard, entering Highway 24 on the west end of the town and ending up in Orinda Village where they were met with people carrying Black Lives Matter placards. As cars passed honking their horns, pedestrians showed support by clapping. More than 300 cars took part.

In Moraga, a large crowd of approximately 500, according to Moraga police department estimates, gathered at the Moraga Commons June 4 holding signs that read "Black Lives Matter," "Enough," "No Justice, No Peace," "Vote," among many others. Organized by Campolindo and Miramonte high school students, word of the protest expanded and residents of all ages, almost all masked, joined the peaceful protesters.

The two-and-a-half hour gathering opened with nearly nine minutes of silence, the amount of time Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who has been charged with second degree murder, pinned George Floyd to the ground on May 25 by pushing his knee into Floyd's neck.

The local protesters were reminded that they were living in a bubble where only 0.96% of the population is black and where prejudice is rampant. Reading off social media posts a Miramonte student illustrated the fact that racism is alive and well in Lamorinda. She called for a change in culture.

Gary Hill, a Moraga dad who is part of the 0.96% minority, said that seeing all the people coming to the Commons inspired him. He read a text he wrote called "Is it COVID or is it racism?" drawing a parallel between the two epidemics. Fear, uncertainty, fatigue, anger and death are, for Hill, common to both. There can be a vaccine to end COVID, but how to eradicate the other? Hill's recommendation is compassion, staying safe and making sure all others are as well, relating to each other's feelings and reaching out to those who are affected.

Gigi Crowder from the National Alliance on Mental Illness talked about Miles Hall, the 23-year-old black man who just a year ago suffered a mental breakdown and was shot and killed by the Walnut Creek police.

Stereotypes and implicit biases were called out as something we all have and that police officers should be better trained.

Moraga police officers stood around the peaceful crowd without incident, mainly helping seniors cross Moraga Road when the gathering dismantled. Chief Jon King, who had posted on his department's website that he and his officers were all physically ill and disgusted by what they saw (the video of George Floyd's death), commented that the protest at the Commons was very well done, and that he was honored to be there to listen to the concern of the people in the community. He reached out to Crowder at the end of the gathering to discuss possible additional training for his officers.

There was a protest in Orinda June 6, and another much larger protest took place June 7 in Lafayette. The crowd of approximately 3,000 people squeezed onto Plaza Park to hear multiple speakers. Many more were crammed along both sides of Moraga Road and next to Safeway. A few Lafayette police officers, who kept a low profile during the event, kept the crowd spilling over onto Mt. Diablo Boulevard safe.

The event lasted over 3 hours and ended peacefully.

Several speakers, including Campolindo High School Counselor Patrick Turner, asked Lamorindans to imagine what it would be like to walk in their shoes, afraid for their lives when pulled over by police. They called for action and actual equality.



About 500 peaceful protesters came to the Moraga Commons park June 4. Photo Sophie Braccini



Protesters march up Mt. Diablo Boulevard June 7 in support of Black Lives Matter. Photo Pippa Fisher



Cars gather at Acalanes May 31 ahead of a peaceful rally through Lafayette to Orinda. Photo Pippa Fisher

Reach the reporter at: pippa@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA