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## No poppies for Veterans Day, but Veterans of Foreign Wars keep up most programs

By Sora O'Doherty

Like almost everything else, 2020 has been a challenge for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Post 8063 serves Lamorinda and Walnut Creek out of the Veterans Building in Lafayette, but the building has been shut down for the past 12 months, according to Terry Murphy, Service Officer and past Post Commander.

The VFW ordinarily raises funds to support its activities by the sale of poppies on Memorial Day and Veterans Day, but this year, that has not been possible. Not only is it not allowed, Murphy says, but he would not want to jeopardize the members, most of whom are veterans of World War II and the Korean War. In addition, the Post has held no meetings. However, it is continuing with its two national scholarship programs, Voice of Democracy, an audio essay competition for high school students, and Patriot Pen, a writing contest for middle school students. The only program eliminated for 2020 is the Teacher of the Year, owing to the difficulty of evaluating teachers outside the classroom.

VFW Post 8063 is a sponsoring VFW Post and awards a local scholarship. The national first-place winner of the Voice of Democracy, a recorded patriotic themed audio-essay, will receive a \$30,000 scholarship. Plus, additional scholarships from \$1,000 to \$16,000 will be awarded. Each year, more than 51,000 high school students from across the

country enter to win their share of more than \$1.9 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program. The theme this year is, "Is This the Country the Founders Envisioned?"

The theme for this year's Patriot's Pen is "What is Patriotism to Me?" Each year more than 138,000 students (grades 6-8) enter the contest for a chance to win their share of more than \$900,000 in state and national awards. Each first-place state winner receives a minimum of \$500 at the national level, and the national first place winner wins \$5,000 and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington DC.

Entries for both contests were due by the end of October and are under consideration now. Anyone wishing to make a contribution to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, in lieu of poppy sales, may make a donation to VFW Post 8063, PO Box 1025, Lafayette CA 94549.

There is also a GoFundMe drive for the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Center. The building, located at the intersection of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Risa Road in Lafayette, is about 12 years old and replaced an older one built in the 1930s. The building is owned by the county and is operated by a building board with a professional manager. The building is leased to the veterans and two groups call it home: The American Legion Post #517 and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #8063. All the monies need to run the building come from the building

being utilized by the public and functions as a quasi-community center and in times of need as a cooling/charging station (during blackouts). In times of threats it is designated as a secure place for children and others, including everyone at Temple Isaiah.

Before the pandemic, the veterans were quite successful and used funds in excess of their need to do upgrades to the building (about \$100,000 for efficient lighting) to support local veterans help projects (East Bay Stand Down, Concord Veterans Center, Marines Memorial, disaster relief for veterans and others), local scouting and to provide the granite memorial at the building to all veterans lost since 9/11. There was a plan to use some of the funds to install a generator that would have provided the power needed during the PSPS blackouts, but with the loss of revenue during the pandemic, those funds were needed just to keep the lights on, doors open, trash picked up, landscaping done, alarms/insurance payed for and the building managed.

According to Murphy, "The GoFundMe drive is our way to ask the public for a little help to keep this Memorial alive so it will be there for the veterans of the community and those returning from their service to our country. We hope to replace what we had and if possible continue doing the upgrades and supporting our veterans." The GoFundMe page is located at [www.gofundme.com/f/a2ydb9-help-our-vets](http://www.gofundme.com/f/a2ydb9-help-our-vets).

## Orinda students return to schools

By Sora O'Doherty

Some Orinda students have already returned to the classroom, and a plan for the return of all students was adopted by the Orinda Union School District Board Oct. 29.

Elementary special education students returned to school Nov. 3 while Orinda Intermediate School special ed students return Nov. 12. Transitional kindergarten and kindergarten students will return to school on Nov. 30 and third to fifth grade students will return on Dec. 7. On Jan. 4 all elementary and OIS students will return from winter break in distance learning mode, with a return to campus for all students on Jan. 7, except for those students whose families have chosen to remain in the distance learning mode.

The model of education that was adopted by the board is one proposed by the OUSD principals. The principals' plan suggested moving the flex day from Monday back to Wednesdays, but that change was not accepted by the board. Although the teachers argued

that it is tough to get kids started on asynchronous work on a Monday without having seen their teacher, the board wanted to keep all the schools on the same schedule for the convenience of parents who have children in different schools, and the Monday flex day was also determined to be convenient for COVID-19 testing. However, Carol Brown said that she hopes that other districts change the flex day to Wednesday.

The plan presented by the principals was not well accepted by the board, but was adopted with slight modification in an effort to at least move forward with a first step. The board did request that the principals return at the next board meeting with an improved plan. Board member Hilary Weiner voted against the plan, which was adopted by a majority, but not a unanimous vote.

The principals said the plan maintains the benefits of distance learning while providing significant time for on-site instruction and social engagement. It minimizes logistical challenges such as multiple carpools, lunch, midday transition between students, and cleaning between the different cohorts, will provide an easier transition to and from full distance learning, if needed, and allows the entire class to participate in distance learning together four days each week.

The board was disappointed with the amount of time students will be present at the school for academic work, with students in grades 1-5 only present in the school for 160 minutes in the afternoon twice a week. Academic work continues to be via Zoom in the mornings, while afternoons are devoted to in-person instruction and social and emotional learning. In addition, board member Jason Kaune voiced a number of

concerns, with which other board members agreed. The principals were asked to provide a solution for children who are not being well served by distance learning; to align parents with children in multiple grades; to provide day-care options; and to explicitly build the use of cameras into this model.

Board president Cara Hoxie said she was concerned that the previous plan, which provided for an am/pm schedule of the different cohorts, would not work. "I agree," she said, "that this is not a perfect model, but just a step." Board member Liz Daoust wanted to vote to move the plan forward, but have the principals come back to the board with revisions. Board member Carol Brown said, "My heart is with Hilary: this is not what we want for our kids. We want excellence; this is just OK." However she agreed that she wanted to move forward. During the meeting the board also discussed a contract with Goodyear HVAC Sales for portable air purifiers.

COVID-19 testing was available Nov. 9 from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the district office for students, staff and parents, with results available within 48 hours. The testing uses a viral nasal swab, not uncomfortable according OUSD Superintendent Carolyn Seaton, and free for all participants. The board also unanimously accepted the draft community compact, with one minor change to specify that cloth masks are to be worn.

Weiner said that she was proud of the community compact because all the neighboring districts are using it, with some minor tweaks. The compact cannot be enforced, but Daoust said that she hopes that families and staff are taking it really seriously because it is truly an integral part of "who we are as a community."

## Need Donations?

During the holiday season, Lamorinda Weekly will accept and publish opportunities for local giving. Send up to approximately 200 words describing the cause, type of donation needed, and where to bring or to send it. The organization collecting the donations, or receiving the donations, should be within our extended community. Submissions must be sent to [storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com) by Nov. 18 for inclusion in our Nov. 25 issue. Include "Season of Giving" in the subject line.



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