

# Letters to the editor

## A sincere apology

After the June 23 Town Council meeting, I had the opportunity to review the recording and in particular to observe what was undeniably my inappropriate demeanor and the improper tenor of my questioning of Susan Allison of the Mulberry Preschool.

I immediately wrote and sincerely apologized to Ms. Allison for my conduct the night before. I acknowledged to her that I was unjustifiably aggressive, what might be regarded as being in "lawyer mode", and that it was wholly inappropriate and uncalled for. When I am in Town Council meetings, I sit as a Councilmember, not as an attorney or as a mediator, and I clearly overstepped my bounds.

I wish to convey my apology, not only to the members of the public who came out that night in support of Ms. Allison and the Mulberry Preschool, but also to the residents of Moraga as a whole. Even in the process of devoting my best efforts to my duties as a Councilmember, I occasionally make mistakes, and occasionally those mistakes hurt someone else's feelings, as my error in judgment at the Council meeting hurt Ms. Allison's feelings. The test of my character should be measured by my response following my awareness and acknowledgment of my error. Sincere apologies should never be cheapened by excuses or justifications or explanations, as those are intended to give the person apologizing a pass, to let him off the hook for the mistake and to persuade himself that he is not a bad person. When I apologized the night of the Council meeting, I broke this cardinal rule and acknowledged that to Ms. Allison the following morning.

My experience serving this first year on the Town Council has been met with a steeper learning curve than I anticipated. In the process of having to make the difficult choices and then advocating for my viewpoint, I have admittedly fallen prey to overzealousness. My commitment to all of you is to learn from my mistakes and not to repeat them in the performance of my duties and responsibilities. I ask you to accept my profound apology for your understanding.

David Stromberg  
Town Councilmember  
Town of Moraga

## Moraga Garden Center

Kenny Murakami is an irreplaceable treasure! I was shocked to open your paper and see that his nursery will close in the fall.

His farewell notice brought tears to my eyes. Of course, it makes sense that he retire now, but his legion of gardening fans are bereft, I'm sure.

We may have thought he would be there forever, but we can't say we didn't know how lucky we were to have him. I think all of us know just how special Kenny is. We have some good nurseries in our area, but there is nothing that compares to what Kenny provided us. So we wish him the best going forward and hope he knows how much he has enriched our lives.

Jenny and John Kolkhorst  
Orinda

## Garden Center closure and lawsuit abuse

Last week in the Lamorinda Weekly, I was sad to read that the Moraga Garden Center is closing its doors after over 40 years in business. As a Moraga resident I always try to

frequent our local businesses if possible, rather than going to our neighboring cities for goods and services. The Moraga Garden Center is the only nursery in town and it's a shame that an ADA-related lawsuit from a serial plaintiff pushed them to close their doors. Kenny and his wife have been serving local residents for decades with some of the best advice and highest quality plants in the area.

Unfortunately, Kenny is not alone. Lawsuit abuse is a problem that has plagued California for far too long. In Kenny's case, his nursery was built before the ADA was even conceived and the cost of retrofitting a small business is far too costly in a state with already high taxes. And think of how many other local mom and pop establishments are in the same boat. Apparently, there are a lot, because thousands of businesses in the Golden State are targeted with predatory ADA lawsuits each year.

As of late, lawsuit abuse has grown in popularity and small businesses are targeted because it's easier to write a check rather than face the high costs of going to court—or in this case unfortunately, close it's doors. California small businesses already have enough hoops to jump through and lawsuit abuse should not be one of them. Thank you Kenny for your 40+ years of dedication and making us Moragans better stewards of the Earth. You will be missed and best wishes to you and your wife.

Ashley Hemkin  
Moraga

## Consider the bees

Thank god we have Amazon to ship products directly to our doors. Of the 177 people I have met this summer while canvassing to save the bees, many have had Amazon packages waiting for them. As customers of the largest online retailer, we should know that Amazon has made no move to stop the sale of bee-killing neonic pesticides, a problem I'm spending my summer working on.

Many know that bee populations are struggling with climate change and habitat loss. 1/4 native bee species are at risk of extinction. This is putting at risk the 90% of native plants and 75% of all food crops that depend on them. Why should Amazon make this any worse by continuing to profit from the sale of bee-killing neonic pesticides?

Environment California is part of a national campaign working to mobilize consumers to demonstrate that we do not want Amazon to sell bee-killing pesticides. After consumers called for action, Home Depot, Lowes, and Walmart have committed to not selling neonic pesticides. So if you care about pollinators, tell Amazon to pledge to not sell neonic pesticides as well!

Ben Fromer  
Lafayette

## Reflecting on the return to in-person classes

There is no doubt in my mind that virtual school was a new challenge for me. But not only for me but also for my parents, teachers, and siblings. The feeling of isolation that we all felt during this time was omnipresent. The lengths we went to keep ourselves and others safe. And we succeeded, to an extent. It was enough to get those little corner shops we love up and running. But for me, it was enough to get my school up and running. After a year of glaring at our computer

screens, you would think I would jump at a chance for a regular school day. But for me, it was not as clear-cut as this. As much as I like to complain about virtual school, it did come with its pros. Being able to wake up a minute before class, eating when I wish. But, my favorite luxury was ... not having to use school bathrooms. See what I mean? Not half bad, right? The one problem about getting used to this new normal was I got too used to it. When that email came, informing me that we could go back to school, I somehow convinced myself to return to school. Yet, after walking back and forth across campus, lugging my backpack along, I started to regret my decision.

After all, why should I have left the comfort of my bed? Even so, I trudged through the rest of the day. The next day felt like a switch had been turned on. I joked and played with my friends. I competed for some candy. The difference between these two days was immense. Despite my first day being abysmal, I realized getting back to normal or transitioning to a new normal will always be challenging at first. After all, Roosevelt himself said that "nothing that comes easy is worth having." This has been my personal experience, and I hope it inspires you to restart old interests or challenge yourself to new experiences.

Arnav Misra  
JM student

## Where does MOFD's money go?

Gary Fryer wrote that he was happy MOFD Directors were saving his tax dollars by not providing fire prevention services. It appears that Mr. Fryer may not understand how public agency funding works.

MOFD gets a fixed portion of our property taxes (\$29 million this year). If it is not spent on things like fire prevention, where does it go? Not to lower taxes. This year's budget has almost the entire amount (\$27 million) going to employee salaries and benefits.

So what do Directors Baitx, Danziger and Donner want to do with the money?

They were elected with \$30,000 from the firefighters' union and the efforts of firefighters, most of whom do not live here, walking from house to house campaigning for them. They each won by small margins (52% of the vote) and now they control the board which is negotiating with the firefighters' union on a new contract. You

can imagine what they want to do with the money.

Director Baitx is doubly conflicted as he is a firefighter in East Contra Costa and whatever raises he grants to MOFD firefighters will be used as a benchmark for his own salary negotiations.

The firefighters are valuable public employees but they tricked us into electing public officials for their gain, not ours. Remember that when these three, or their replacements, come up for election next year.

Steve Cohn  
Orinda

## Using funds wisely

In the July 7th issue of this paper, a Letter to the Editor writer suggested that MOFD funds should not be spent on a chipper and its operation. The writer's argument was that removal of hazardous brush is a personal responsibility and should not be funded by taxpayer money. This writer was against purchasing a "community chipper" to help citizens dispose of dangerous overgrowth. However, the majority of Orindans consider fire prevention our city's top priority and voted in favor of Measure R to do so. As a result, Measure R funds have been allocated for the purchase of a chipper for Orinda.

The fact that the MOFD board voted not to continue its chipper service last summer no doubt prompted the city's decision. Many residents were upset by the board's decision, since \$28 million of annual taxpayer funds support the MOFD and since 90% of our property taxes are spent on MOFD employee compensation. The three board directors who voted not to continue the chipper program had campaigns heavily funded by Union money.

Some of our residents have circumstances that make it difficult to dispose of the hazardous brush and trees that

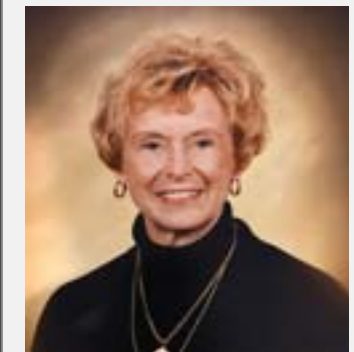
they have laboriously removed from their property. A chipper permits the safe disposal of this danger, which is a danger to all of Orinda. We are one community, and flammable material proposes a peril to all of us. No one doubts that recent droughts have placed us all in serious jeopardy, and the next few months are particularly fraught with the risk of wild-fires.

It didn't make sense to me that the MOFD would cancel such a service last summer.

Tax money should be used to keep us all safe, and that is what Orindans voted for when they voted in favor of Measure R.

Kathleen Finch  
Orinda

## In Memory



Friends of Jackie Reising will gather Saturday July 31st at Lafayette Orinda Presbyterian Church for a post-Covid celebration of her life. Jackie died in November 2020 and we were unable to safely mark her passing then. The church service starts at 11am. A reception will follow at Postino Restaurant in Lafayette from 1 to 4pm.

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