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Town accepts \$470K California Department of Justice Tobacco Grant

By Vera Kochan

In order to help law enforcement agencies combat tobacco-related crimes involving juveniles, the California Department of Justice Tobacco Grant program was established in 2017. Over \$124 million in grants have been awarded to police departments with the purpose of providing tobacco-related education and outreach to under-aged youths.

According to a staff report presented to the town council on Dec. 8, Moraga Police Chief Jon King and Lt. Brian South shared some findings from the 2019-20 California Healthy Kids Survey. "Campolindo High School students self-reported that 36% of 11th-graders had used a vape (electronic cigarette) product and 8% had smoked an entire cigarette. Additionally, only 37% of ninth-grade students believed that occasional cigarette smoking was harmful and only 34% thought occasional vaping was harmful."

The staff report also mentioned that "the October 2019 Merrill Fire was started by a discarded vaping device and teens or young adults were observed in the area just prior to the start of the fire."

During the grant application process, MPD declared a proposal to hire a Juvenile Officer to the force whose assignment would involve the coordination of tobacco-related education, outreach and enforcement within the town. Said officer would provide tobacco-related training to the other officers within the department and retain contact with schools in order to conduct educational presentations on campuses.

At this point, there are nine establishments in Moraga engaged in the sale of tobacco involved products. MPD intends to work with those retailers to ensure their compliance with the town's statues and ordinances. In November, MPD was notified of the \$470,736 grant award (the full amount that was requested), which covers a 36-month period. The town council voted unanimously to accept the grant.

"The kudos go to Lt. South," declared King. "He actually did a lot of the research and found this grant. We've been talking about it and single-handedly, with only a minor amount of editing from yours truly, got this taken care of; got the grant written; followed up with the Department of Justice and hounded them a little bit; and literally brought home the bacon.

"Credit where credit's due on this one, Brian," added King. "He knows I think the world of him anyway. He did an incredible job on this and great work for us."

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