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Tragic events unfold over weekend in quiet Moraga neighborhood

By Vera Kochan

The Moraga Police Department responded to a disturbance at 11:45 a.m. Feb. 12 on the 300 block of Birchwood Drive after neighbors reported hearing a woman screaming for help. According to interim MPD Chief Jon King, officers had arrived to discover that a man in his 50s had assaulted his female neighbor with a baseball bat by hitting her in the head. Officers attempted to speak with the man, but he refused to comply, going in and out of his house several times; eventually staying inside. While the officers tried to de-escalate the situation, additional units from Orinda, Lafayette, Walnut Creek (with a K-9 unit), and a trained negotiator from the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office arrived. The Community Warning System (CWS) issued a lockdown alert for the area. Authorities urged residents to go inside and lock all doors and windows as a safety precaution. The alert was eventually lifted at 4 p.m. "Officers attempted to negotiate with the suspect by calling him and through a PA System," explained King. "We even had drones to observe the residence." The suspect, at one point, opened the front door holding a gun and tried to shoot down the drone. He also tried to fire a shot at the officers, which wound up lodged in the door. Officers used "a less lethal weapon" (bean bag bullets) to try and stop him, in order to take him into custody, with no luck. The standoff continued until 2:30 p.m. when the suspect went into his backyard and committed suicide using an AR-15 style rifle. No one else was home at the time of the incident. The suspect's victim was transported to John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek and was released later that evening. "We're very thankful for the assistance we received from our allied agencies," stated King. "We did our best to resolve the situation as quickly as possible."

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