

Letters to the editor

Equal representation in local news

Your August 3 article, "Swim clubs dive into OMPA traditions," perpetuates special-needs athletes' invisibility by erasing their existence. The writer's focus on the "magical air" and sense of "unique community" fostered by a meet among private swim clubs fails to mention the participation of the East Bay Sea Serpents, a local team of Special Olympic athletes.

I hope future articles on this annual event will include the Sea Serpents' participation and do so in a way that celebrates the athletes rather than spotlighting the organizers' logistics in including diverse members of the swim community. For an example of how not to approach writing about special-needs athletes, see Lamorinda Weekly's well-intentioned but misfocused April 27 article, "Special Olympics returns to Acalanes after two-year hiatus," which interviewed six people involved in organizing the event and not a single participating athlete. People with special needs are members of the Lamorinda community and deserve equal representation in the local news.

Jennifer Reid
Lafayette

Acalanes and Lafayette School Board endorsement

To my fellow Lafayette residents: If you don't often pay attention to our local school board elections, now is the time. In particular, this November, I ask for your support in voting for Sarah Lind, Niels Larsen and Robb McSorley for Lafayette School Board and Gabe Ledeen, Renee Nowac and Mark Woolway for Acalanes Union High School Board.

I have spent the last 21 years devoted to coaching and mentoring the youth of Lafayette, currently involved with two sports at Acalanes (football and girls lacrosse). Having worked closely with our young people for so long, I can tell you how damaging the past 30 months have been to many of them at such a critical time in their lives. The candidates I endorse understand this.

Negative repercussions have arisen in response to recent decisions to lower our academic standards and opportunities. I see this decline first hand as I attended our public schools starting in seventh grade and my sons went all the way through our districts from K to 12. There is an urgent need to return the focus of schools to the primary mission of providing a top-notch academic environment. Within that goal, there should be a focus on the whole child ... each and

every student in our districts deserve the attention they need. These candidates are ready to step up and do everything they can to restore our school environment to that which existed in our community for so many years.

A major issue facing our schools is decreased enrollment. Since 2019, the LAFSD has seen an enrollment decline greater than 11%. School funding follows enrollment, so unless it resolves, there will be major budget shortfalls which will include painful cuts, within years.

Sarah Lind, Niels Larsen, Robb McSorley, Gabe Ledeen, Renee Nowac and Mark Woolway are stepping up to run for the Boards at a critical time. Please join me in supporting these candidates. Your vote for them is of crucial importance. Thank you.
Bill Fraser
2022 Lafayette co-Citizen of the Year

Censorship in Moraga

I write to express agreement with Nick Waranoff's recent Letter to the Editor opining that censorship by the left is rampant in Moraga. In agreement is no less an authority than Nadine Strossen, professor emerita at New York Law School and president of the American Civil Liberties Union from 1991 through 2008. She describes the current opposition to freedom of speech and viewpoint diversity in a lengthy interview in the Wall Street Journal (August 6-7.)

Robert Coffman
Moraga

Michael Donner for District 4 MOFD Board

I am writing to share my support for Michael Donner, incumbent for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors in District 4.

As a resident and business owner in Orinda, I've invested time in joining CERT and getting our neighborhood certified through Firewise. I'd also like to make sure our Board of Directors in District 4 contains citizens that are passionate, knowledgeable, and experienced when it comes to protecting our neighborhoods from fires and other emergencies.

Here are just some of Michael's accomplishments while on the Board:

- Increased the fire prevention program.
- Supported and passed a fair labor contract for firefighters.
- Negotiated the contract to keep our chief.
- Purchased Type 6 fire engines for

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wildland firefighting.

Currently, Michael is working with the city of Orinda on the best way to spend measure R money.

If you don't already know Michael Donner from his work on the board, perhaps you know him from his thousands of volunteer hours in our local community in addition to his 30-year career as an Oakland firefighter.

Michael continues to work tirelessly to help others. A dear friend of mine recently experienced a devastating house fire. Michael was the first person I called for advice on how to help. He not only gave me some suggestions, but he also took time from his schedule to reach out to these folks (that he didn't even know) to see how he could assist as they navigated through their loss.

Amy Berryhill
Orinda

Discrimination versus racism

A June 22 letter in this paper continued efforts by some in this community to curb school Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging programs.

Quoting Ibram X. Kendi, the writer shared important guidance,

"The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination" (How to be an Antiracist, p19).

However, a wrong conclusion was then asserted – that antiracist discrimination is racism. This would mean that the evil of racism (which leads to things like the mass killing in Buffalo, the merciless murder of George Floyd, lynching, and the brutality of slavery) is the same as antiracism (which leads to justice, peace, reconciliation).

Equating discrimination that considers race with actual racism tears at the ethical fabric of community by trying to strip the plain meaning from words we all understand. If this reversal of meaning is successful it renders honest and meaningful communication – and thus community – impossible.

The belief that all race-based discrimination is racist crumbles with a simple real-life example.

Historically, district libraries were filled with books by white authors. Why? Our schools, and the publishing industry, reflected white culture by favoring white authors. The remedy included discriminating in favor of stories by Black writers. Balancing and broadening library content is not racism,

it's antiracism.

White people are beginning to reckon with an extreme historical sin – 250 years of slavery. The racial divide in our country, as David Brooks put it, "is born out of sin" (New York Times, 3/7/2019). Addressing the multitude of sins that flowed from slavery and eliminating enduring racist beliefs are what antiracist work is ultimately about.

Discrimination is either racist or antiracist. We all wish to live in a post-racial society, where racism is a thing of the past. With honest assessments of where we stand today and hard work to eliminate racism, we may finally reach post-racial harmony. But we're not there yet. Antiracist discrimination is part of what's required to get there.

Todd Hollenberg
Lafayette

Eve Philips for Orinda Unified School District Board of Trustees

My wife Rhoda and I built our life together in Orinda. We were fortunate that included raising three children who all had the opportunity of attending Orinda schools. We, along with other Orinda parents and citizens, have invested in our schools by volunteering, fundraising and through property tax assessments. Those actions paid off. Today Orinda continues to be recognized as a community that supports and delivers excellence in education for Orinda children. I do not want to risk that highly valued Orinda legacy.

There are choices soon to be made regarding the election of new OUSD board members. I will vote for Eve Philips for the OUSD board. Eve attended Miramonte, went on to MIT to achieve an MS in Computer Science, an MBA at Stanford and today makes her home in Orinda as a working mother of four. Additionally, she has successful work experience in the health care, software, and venture capital industries.

Eve is already recognized in our community as an effective leader for Orinda. She has served on the Orinda City Council and has the endorsement of Amy Worth and Inga Miller. Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Anderson and three current OUSD board members, Cara Hoxie, Carol Brown, and Jason Kaune have all endorsed Eve. For the OUSD board.

Maintain the excellence in education for our special Orinda community and support Eve Philips for OUSD Trustee.
Bob Regalado
40 year Orinda resident

Lamorinda's wealth of health on display at Moraga Commons



Sunday Strong instructors at Moraga Commons Park Photo provided

Submitted by Brenda Luster

Lamorinda is filled with health-conscious citizens who run, walk their dogs, bike through our beautiful hills, and this last summer, participated in a new program at the Moraga Commons Park called Sunday Strong. Sunday Strong was started by the Moraga Commu-

nity Foundation, in cooperation with the Town of Moraga Parks and Recreation Department, to offer free fitness classes every Sunday morning in the park during June and July.

Lamorinda's finest instructors volunteered their time to promote the health and well-being of our community and help MCF raise awareness for the Commons Enhancement Program, which includes the

purchase and installation of a new ADA compliant, 4-stall, gender-neutral restroom facility at the south end of the Commons Park. The program showcased these amazing local instructors and offered a variety of fitness classes including Bootcamp, Yoga, Pilates, and Tai Chi.

"Sunday Strong gave our community an opportunity to connect personally with neighbors and civically in support of MCF to improve the park facilities," said Brenda Luster of the Moraga Community Foundation (www.moragacommunityfoundation.org). "Engaging the mind, body, spirit, and community rejuvenates us and others around us."

Christine Vleck Jensen has been teaching Pilates for over 15 years in San Francisco and is now opening a Mighty Pilates in downtown Lafayette (www.MightyPilates.com). "The Sunday Strong program was a great way to introduce the local fitness community to a variety of classes," Vleck Jensen said. "Participants who attended my class were thrilled to have the

opportunity to try different classes and instructors all while enjoying being outside in the park."

Vleck Jensen is an accomplished lifelong athlete having been a Division 1 softball player, cyclist, and an Ironman. With the addition of a Nutrition degree from Cornell and an MBA from Berkeley, she is proving herself an invaluable health and fitness resource for the Lamorinda community.

Belle Hammond founded Moraga Bootcamp (www.moragabootcamp.com) and is a certified instructor in multiple disciplines. She has spent the last 11 years passionately motivating others to live a healthy lifestyle. Her promise is "to meet each one of [my] clients where they are in their current journey."

Katie Rogers teaches Ash-tanga/Vinyasa yoga at Atma Yoga in Orinda (www.mind-bodyonline.com). Rogers started teaching yoga in 2006 with the goal "that students experience not only a mental and physical release in her class, but that they leave with a re-

newed sense of inner peace and connectedness."

Dina Rickson is an avid health and fitness advocate in Moraga and has taught Pilates for over 20 years, currently offering her expertise at Joy in Motion (www.joyinmotiondance.org) and also runs a successful Arbonne business furthering her commitment to healthy living.

Grandmaster Marilyn Cooper has been training and teaching the art of traditional Chinese Kung Fu for over 50 years, winning several titles in national and international competitions. In 1999, after the Columbine High School tragedy, Marilyn found a way to bring the peacefulness of T'ai Chi training to our youth to help prevent bullying and encourage empathy by creating the 9 Tai Chi Peace Games (www.pushingforpeace.org).

Sunday Strong has ended but these health and fitness guru's continue to offer a wealth of resources and talents serving as a vital part of the Lamorinda community and our quality of life.

New LafSD Superintendent

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"Meeting people is absolutely my biggest goal. I really value being out in the schools, walking the hallways, seeing classrooms and hanging out with parents on the sidewalk. I'm going to be listening really hard and learning," Stephens says. "It's about getting to know the families that call Lafayette home and also about learning their concerns and aspirations."

Stephens is proud of the changes that are happening in the district this academic year ranging from onsite counselor

at all elementary schools to universal lunch programs to the work being done to enhance and strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

"There's a lot of great work taking place that predates me. I'm plugging into the lines of conversation. When it's appropriate I can build on what's already there and add some different perspectives."

Stephens started his path as an educator way back when he was a 19-year-old college student at University of California, Santa Barbara with a position as a paraeducator,

which he held for about three years. During that same time he had a side weekend gig as a janitor in the college dorms. After working as a paraprofessional educator for three years, Stephens joined his (then girlfriend, now) wife in the Bay Area to begin a credentialing program at the New College of California. He then spent eight years teaching in roles ranging from a bilingual Spanish teacher to a special ed teacher.

When asked about the most important lesson he's learned on his educational journey from working with students from all backgrounds,

Stephens had a simple yet profound answer.

"We need to remember that every student is the hero in their own story," Stephens says. "Even when mistakes are made, we can learn and grow from them."

As for the adult generation, Stephens says he's learned that a lot can be accomplished simply by listening to each other. "I believe deeply that the answer is always in the room and that it's really a matter of listening effectively and trying to draw out from the people in the group," he says. "(There's a) sort of collective

genius that exists in every group."

Greg Barnes, Assistant Superintendent of Student Success, says he believes Stephens' breadth of experience and approach to getting things done will benefit the district. "I'm particularly excited about the equity and special education work Brent has led over the years to see how it can inform our work in Lafayette," Barnes says. "(From what we've seen in the short time we've worked with Stephens), he is student centered and has a thoughtful approach to decision making."