

Published June 21st, 2023

MPD holds well-attended Town Hall

By Vera Kochan



Moraga Police Chief Jon King updates residents during Town Hall Photo Vera Kochan

The Moraga Police Department's Town Hall invited residents to the Council Chambers on June 5 to update attendees on the latest crime statistics, trends, scams, and equipment policy, followed by a question/answer session.

Chief Jon King gave his slide presentation with several MPD staff and officers included in the crowd of approximately 40 residents. It was noted that the 13 officers employed within the department includes the chief, a lieutenant, supervisors, a dedicated detective and patrol officers. Two support services personnel handle records, finance, evidence, training, administrative support, fingerprinting, front desk and more. There are also reserve officers who volunteer to patrol and assist.

King noted the many achievements for MPD during 2022. The department obtained a grant to fully fund an additional police officer for three years; successfully lobbied the town council to ban the sale of flavored tobacco and vape devices; collected over 700 pounds of prescription drugs for destruction at no charge to residents; hired and trained a new police lieutenant and three new police officers; conducted virtual evacuation drills and worked closely with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District on emergency planning; collected toys for the United States Marine Corp Toys for Tots campaign to benefit underprivileged kids; made 122 arrests (13 of which were local and 109 were out-of-towners) and issued over 800 citations for a variety of offenses; and continued the partnership with Moraga's schools and other Lamorinda agencies.

As of June 4, the year-to-date Crime Statistics for the midway point of 2023 show an overall decrease in crime totals (54), as compared to the entire four previous years of 2019 (155), 2020 (162), 2021 (150), and 2022 (199). The crimes are the same for all five years. With regards to 2023, these statistics are: homicide (0), sexual assaults (1), robbery (0), assaults (7), burglary (9), larceny (33), and vehicle theft (4). One alarming statistic showed an increase in traffic citations. For the entire year of 2022, there were 272 citations; while only 6 months into 2023, the figure has nearly doubled at 428. Traffic accidents reported for 2022 were 22; while at the midway point for 2023, there have already been 13. King stated that new policies require police departments to report all incidences, thereby accounting for the possible up-tick in statistics. He added that with the additional forensic equipment available to the them, MPD is able to collect more evidence against perpetrators.

Another topic during the presentation was scams. King noted that most scams come in the form of phone calls or emails, and he warned that anyone can be a victim to the seemingly realistic and clever scammers. Some of the currently popular scams are from people claiming to be a government agent (from the Internal Revenue Service or Social Security); Pacific Gas and Electric representatives; someone pretending to be a family member in trouble; Zillow Rental; and a private party internet purchase.

King gave several tips of advice to avoid being taken in by a scam: nothing should be secret - always ask family/friends for help; neither the IRS or PG&E will hound you out of the blue by phone for payment; police don't collect warrants over the phone; no one has you pay with a gift card or Green Dot card; if government agencies need your help, they will make an official request - not a secretive phone call. And if it seems too good to be true - it probably is; if it is a good deal now - it will be tomorrow, too; and don't click on an internet link.

MPD has taken advantage of Assembly Bill 481 which was approved in September 2021, and allows law enforcement agencies to purchase military equipment for its use. Currently the department has a backup generator and less lethal shotguns that use bean bag projectiles.

With fire season fast approaching, coupled with living in an earthquake-prone state, King reminded everyone to be prepared for emergencies. Have a plan for your family; sign up for the Community Warning System (cwsalerts.com) and Nixle (nixle.com); prepare a Go Bag for yourself and pets; have a neighborhood phone tree (at least for your next-door neighbors); and make sure that your house is emergency ready. Check with www.firewise.org to make certain that you are fire safe, and visit Zonehaven Aware (www.zonehaven.com/aware) to learn your zone evacuation number. Be aware of the possibility of future Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) by updating your contact information with PG&E (pge.com/mywildfirealerts) or call 1-866-743-6589.

In closing, King discussed Senate Bill 553, by Senator Dave Cortese, which is progressing to the State

Assembly. The bill would ban retail staff from interfering with thieves in the process of stealing from a store by protecting them from workplace violence. In an interview with Fox 2/KTVU, California Retailers Association President Rachel Michelin stated, "This bill goes way too far, number one, where I think it will open the doors even wider for people to come in and steal from our stores." Most recently in the news was an incident at the Home Depot in Pleasanton where a 26-year-old security guard was shot to death while trying to prevent a theft.

The point King was trying to make to residents was that little things like locking your car and home; not leaving valuables in plain sight; not discussing vacation plans in public; and most importantly being aware of your surroundings would lead to a safer Moraga and discourage trouble from coming into town, because "they know we are complacent. Ninety percent of crimes can be prevented. You know your neighborhood better than anybody. Bad guys look for an easy mark."

To contact Chief Jon King call (925) 888-7049 or email: king@moraga.ca.us; to contact Lieutenant Steve Borbely call (925) 888-7052 or email: borbely@moraga.ca.us ; MPD business line call (925) 888-7055 or general email: police@moraga.ca.us.

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

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