

Small actions add up to big change over time

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

An intergenerational crowd of nearly 100 people—including mothers, children, and community elders, came together recently to share art and stories, and connect with each other at the Soul of my Soul Exhibit sponsored by the Mount Diablo Peace and Justice Center in Lafayette mid-March.

Margli Auclair is a member of the Mount Diablo Peace and Justice Center and an organizer of the event. “We bring awareness to issues like war and social justice,” Auclair said about the nonpartisan organization that hosted the event. The courtyard was filled with artwork, shoes, and photographs. Because many people were fasting for Ramadan, people stopped short of breaking bread together. Instead they enjoyed music, story time with books by Palestinian authors, and time to connect with

one another. “I think it was important for kids to have a chance to hear voices, writing, and stories about Palestinian children, because it gives them a fresh perspective,” Auclair said. “Stories humanize people. It’s important for children to see themselves and each other represented and to know that they matter because they’re part of the community.”

Yosra Abdelaziz said the work of MDPJC exemplifies the power of community. “Our organization is apolitical and independent. It’s made up of moms from different nationalities, religions, and backgrounds that care about human beings and felt compelled to do something” Abdelaziz said. “As moms, we felt the voices of children highlighted a perspective to consider.”

Abdelaziz told participants who might feel overwhelmed, discouraged, and unheard by political leaders, to remember that small things really do matter. “I know that sometimes the problems of the world seem much bigger than us as individuals. And that leaves us [asking ourselves] ‘what’s the point? Will anything I do matter?’” Abdelaziz said. “I’m here to tell you that actions do matter. Everyone has a role. Together, even if we all play a small part, it all adds up.”

The Mount Diablo Peace and Justice Center has launched its 26th annual Art & Writing Challenge and Youth Activist Grant Awards with submissions due on April 20 and a luncheon on May 11. For more information about the center or the contest, visit www.ourpeacecenter.org.

Upcoming fiscal challenges

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The opinion leaders came in at 90%, indicating they are close to the percentage of the mainstream response.

Regarding the low crime concern, Manross said, “When you see crime down here, that’s good. It means your community knows it has a safe community, knows its police department is doing a wonderful job. That’s one of the reasons they chose to move to Lafayette: because it is a safe, wonderful community.”

The opinion leaders and mainstream responders reported 86-90% satisfaction when it came to a number of city-sponsored services and programs. For parks, trails and recreation amenities, it was 86-88%, and satisfaction with the level of police services stood at 83-88%, with 43% of that being very satisfied.

Maintenance of public streets was given a thumbs down at 65-77%. Quality of education is not under the city’s domain, but Manross said it was significant and important to include because it is key to understanding community members’ actual satisfaction and presenting non-skewed findings. That figure ranged from 76-80%. Interactions with city employees the survey showed registered at 63-67% satisfied, which Manross said was strong as compared to other municipalities and showed “something nice about your professional staff. I’m sure this doesn’t hurt their feelings.”

Coding and community development he said are always lower in every city and, true to form, the survey had roughly 25% somewhat to extremely dissatisfied and only 57-58% satisfied.

Turning to solutions to increase revenue to address the \$2 million shortcoming, the survey asked about finding new resources or cutting back services and programs. Manross said options were limited to things such as increasing property tax—an action that would result in about \$200 annually per parcel for property owners. In-

creasing sales tax by one percent was another idea. “Your neighboring communities have done this successfully,” he noted, before mentioning that previous efforts by Lafayette to do the same had failed. He said the problem in part lay in a large percentage of the electorate being unaware of the budget deficits to come.

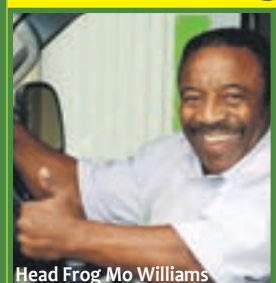
Manross suggested that building support among the undecided or potential probables for approving a sales tax increase is critical for it to be successful. “It’s been shown in Lafayette, your voter wants control of how [their] money is spent. [They say], if it’s important enough to me, I’ll spend money on it—but I want to be sure you spend money on it.” He said the good news is that the city needs only 50% to say yes, but the difficulty of coalescing that pool of support is considerable. Awareness of the need is critical, campaigning for either a yes or no vote is not something the city can be

engaged in, and ultimately, voters must trust the source of information and the accuracy, objectivity, and transparency of the information.

After Manross outlined components of community outreach to increase awareness of the situation, public comment had people asking about the cause of the deficit, emphasizing that solutions must relate to the community’s core values, and requires more details about the survey’s process and findings. City staff answered several of the questions and discussed the best methods for implementing the survey findings.

The council amended and accepted staff’s recommendation that the city approve up to \$60,000 for IMC Corp to serve as public relations consultant for up to 8 months to assist with a city-wide informational campaign, inclusive of \$12,000 for Interactive tools to receive residents’ feedback. The matter will return at future meetings.

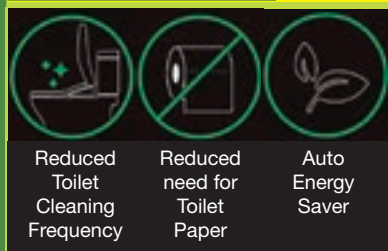
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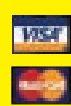
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