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Festival goers get an inside look at a beehive.

Photo Jeff Heyman

Fun in the sun at Earth Day festival

By Jeff Heyman

Hundreds of Lamorindans turned out on a picture-perfect Sunday for this year's Lafayette Earth Day Festival, held on Sunday, April 21 in Lafayette Plaza, the city's long-time community gathering place. The annual festival, put on by Sustainable Lafayette in cooperation with the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and the City of Lafayette, took a different direction this year by being held outdoors and putting the emphasis on making Earth Day an all-in-the-family affair.

There were activities for everyone: Adults could visit the city's Environmental Task Force booth to try

out battery-powered leaf blowers (and be reminded that gas-powered leaf blowers will be banned in Lafayette starting July 1), while kids – and the young at heart – could lose themselves with fluffy and feathered friends in the Lamorinda 4-H Club petting zoo, or enjoy a myriad of games and activities at the All Ages Recreation Downtown booth. And no one will forget the beekeeping display that delighted young and old alike. Jan Pinkerton Spieth from the Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association brought an observation beehive, which she used to point out the queen to fascinated onlookers.

Bicyclists had their bikes tuned up free of charge thanks to 511 Contra Costa, and everyone was encouraged to learn how to do more to improve our environment. There were booths and displays devoted to wildlife, sustainability, wildflower planting, farmers markets, recycling and composting, community gardening, and more, including how to make earth-friendly art. For Earth Day 2024, Lafayette Plaza was the place to be; it was clear from the broad smiles and infectious excitement, Lamorindans were delighted – and educated – by this year's Lafayette Earth Day Festival.

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The show goes on at Orinda Theater – just two less days – for now

By David Scholz



Photo David Scholz

A calling card for Orinda has long been the vibrant marquee of the Orinda Theater aglow seven nights a week for those driving by along Highway 24.

It's a little less so these days, seeing it dark on Mondays and Tuesdays, as owner Derek Zemrak comes to grips with a \$2,000 spike in the cinema's PG&E electricity bill.

"Our goal is to open seven days a week," he said. "We just have to figure out how to do it. We have to do it efficiently."

The one exception to the recent decision is for the last Tuesday of the month for a popular classic film matinee experience that will still welcome patrons on April 30, and for the last Tuesdays in May and June, respectively.

... continued on Page 8

Fire insurance non-renewal puts pressure on Lamorinda residents

By Lou Fancher

Lafayette Council at the meeting April 8 received a staff report from City Manager Niroop Srivatsa about State Farm's plans to stop renewing or cancel home and apartment insurance policies in California beginning July. The move is projected to impact 72,000 insurance policies statewide. In Lamorinda, the non-renewals range from the lowest at 11.6 % for Moraga, to Lafayette's 30.4%, with the highest in Orinda, at 54.7%. Although not within the city's governing authority, the State Farm non-renewals and increases in rates across the board have significant impact on the safety and

monetary security of local residents.

Niroop said "It appears that in Lafayette, 30% (actually 30.4) of the State Farm clients will receive non-renewal notices – not as high as Diablo, Orinda, Calistoga, or Las Gatos, but still significant." She reminded council it is a growing concern already heard from many Lafayette constituents. "State Farm may not be the only insurance carrier that goes through with these non-renewals," she added as an advisory warning.

The City of Orinda issued a letter sent to State legislators and the insurance commissioner urging

them to take some action. With Orinda residents holding 3,115 policies, 1,703 are or will be canceled. The letter was sent by Orinda Mayor Darleen Gee, with council members, the city manager, the Moraga Orinda Firewise Network, and United Policyholders noted as included. The letter stated that while the exact extent and scale of the non-renewals is not yet known, residents are "increasingly concerned and fearful" and "efforts to find replacement policies or even to contact and possibly access the State FAIR plan are problematic."

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See public meetings schedule on these pages and check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements City of Lafayette: www.lovelafayette.org Phone: (925) 284-1968 Chamber of Commerce: www.lafayettechamber.org

Lafayette Public Meetings City Council

Regular Meeting: Monday, May 13, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall Planning Commission Meeting Monday, May 6, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall Design Review Monday, May 13, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Arts & Science Discovery Room

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Protests at Lafayette Elementary School spark controversy

By Lou Fancher

On April 8, Lafayette city council members received, as is the standard procedure at the bi-weekly meetings, several public comments for items not on the agenda. Among them was an is-

sue gaining greater importance in the community, especially for residents with young children who attend Lafayette Elementary School. Recent protests outside of LES have in-

tensified and the frequency has increased as people hold up signs and vocally express their views on the LGBTQ+ community, and, to a lesser extent, on other current day topics.

The first public speaker, Nikki Cowger, said the protests contend transgender youth. "Their posters and shouted words to passersby are hateful and patently false. (They

are) intended to spread fear and contempt for vulnerable children and their families. They take photos and videos of our schools and children, sending those images to other predators encouraging them to come to our town in order to spread hate."

Cowger stated it is "imperative for our local government to take a stand against activities that promote discrimi-

nation and intolerance." She suggested the hateful messages threatened the safety of all people—not just the LGBTQ+ community—in Lafayette. Community outreach and educational programs will make the city more welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community, according to Cowger.

The second speaker, who identified himself as the spouse of Cowger,

said his statement would be more emphatic than that of his wife.

"Lafayette has been attacked," he said. "My family has been attacked." He recalled being bullied in school, which escalated to a physical attack after he had been advised to ignore the bully and was told he would "get bored" and the intimidation would cease.

... continued on Page 10

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Fire insurance non-renewal

... continued from Page 1

The letter went on to say, "We know this emerging crisis is something you are working to address, but the time for action is now. We in local government are not able to effectuate any changes to how this crisis will play out, however, our residents look to us to add our voices to the call for action. The City of Orinda and the Moraga Orinda Fire District are leaders in working to make our community more prepared and wildfire safe. We do this in conjunction with local grassroots partners in the form of the Moraga Orinda Firewise Network which is comprised of many individual Firewise Neighborhoods, and the Moraga Orinda Fire-safe Council. All these collective efforts are starting to pay dividends but are not being factored into insurance coverage and the cancellations. While our commu-

nity does have a high percentage of homes in Very High Fire Severity Zones, we do not yet know if that is the reason for the number of cancellations here."

Urging recipients of the letter to avoid offering one-size-fits-all solutions to communities impacted, the City of Orinda warned that confusing, inhibiting policy-making would leave local elected officials "in the dark" and residents facing possible loss of their homes. Lafayette staff recommended council authorized Mayor Gina Dawson to issue a letter that was similar to the letter sent by Orinda, but introducing language and concerns unique to Lafayette.

In council discussion, council member John McCormick said, "This letter seemed gentle to me. I mean, we're on a crisis of unprecedented proportion and we're writing like, we respectfully ask that you look into this matter. We are well beyond that phase." He went on to say that "homeowners [are] just the tip of the spear," suggesting apartment builders, business owners, and property developers across the industry are losing contracts or forgoing projects due to the difficulty of obtaining fire insurance coverage.

Mayor Dawson agreed that putting "some fire" and being expressive when crafting the letter was a good idea. Council member Wei-Tai Kwok came to the issue and read the Orinda letter while keeping in mind that the city of Orinda has for ten years worked hard with

the Moraga Orinda Fire District to be good citizens and has raised funds to control vegetation and imposed measures to reduce risk. "And yet, insurance companies are not only not rewarding us for reduction of risk, they're not renewing policies. That's the way I read the letter and cities that are doing something, shouldn't they be rewarded?" Coverage isn't a matter of city jurisdiction, but the measures taken to harden homes, Kwok said, should be taken into consideration.

With homeowners experiencing rate increases, drastic policy changes, and non-renewal notices, council member Karl Anduri emphasized that, with the State requiring Lafayette add 20% more housing, the situation would only get worse. How additional housing could be built in extreme high fire risk zones, such as those in Lafayette, when fire insurance was not available, became the rhetorical question left hanging when Dawson opened the meter for public comment.

The first speaker, Dave Clark, posited it would be a mistake to simply mirror the Orinda letter. His home went through the State Farm non-renewal letter, and he encouraged the council move forward with writing letters, while also considering ideas from public comment letters submitted and available online.

Returning to council, council member Susan Candell said she had experienced a State Farm cancellation. After reaching out to an inde-

pendent fire insurance broker, she was told she was only eligible for the State FAIR plan - a far cry from the near dozen carriers the agent used to be able to suggest. His response to her mentioned an increasing number of restrictions on continuing policies, such as months-long approval terms and covering insurance other than fire, which requires a separate contract. She said not being able to obtain fire insurance "is frightening" and the data used by approval registries for risk projection is dated. "If they don't address this cycle, next year we [will] have a calamity."

Council supported sending a letter to Governor Gavin Newsom, but emphasized the need to include real solutions, not just complaints. 3,142 out of 10,000 residences in zip code 94549 is significant market share; Dawson said a vague letter her family had received implied that more non-renewals might be in the pipeline. Anduri asked if mortgage lenders were known to be "stepping in" to offer policies, a question to which there were no answers at the meeting.

Niroop urged council to speak with their counterparts in other cities as they form plans for letters and other actions taken. It was decided and received unanimous approval by council to accept staff's recommendation to compose a letter that will be sent to Governor Newsom, Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara, State Senator Steve Glazer, and Assembly Member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan.

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Lafayette unveils two projects honoring the city's indigenous roots

By Sora O'Doherty



Photos Sora O'Doherty

Lafayette Vice Mayor Wei-Tai Kwok and John McCormick, chair of the city's Land Acknowledgment Task Force, unveiled a utility box wrap honoring indigenous people.

An acknowledgment that Lafayette occupies unceded indigenous land is featured on a utility box wrap, alongside artwork portraying women of the Saklan tribe. The new utility box wrap was unveiled on April 8 on the corner of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Lafayette Circle, adjacent to the Bank of the West building.

The event was presided over by Lafayette Vice Mayor Wei-Tai Kwok and John McCormick. McCormick served as chair of the city's Land Acknowledgment Task Force, and was appointed this year to fill the vacancy on the City Council left by the resignation of Teresa Geringer.

In addition to the utility box wrap, the city also unveiled a new street sign that incorporates both the current name of the street, Mt. Diablo Blvd., and the name of the mountain used by the Ohlone, "Tuyshtak," which means dawn of time.

The utility box team included graphic designer Danielle Gallagher, council member and former mayor Carl Anduri, members of the Lafayette Historical Society Mary McCosker and Andree Hurst, and members of the Public Art Committee: Erling Horn, Yukie Fujimoto, Janice Peacock, and

Christy Mack. In his remarks, Kwok explained that the city "had a year-long exploration of our city's past, including going further back than 175 years to ensure that we understood and honored the original settlers of this land, the indigenous people whose land was taken from them." A task force was appointed to consider an official land acknowledgment statement to symbolize "our city's commitment to honoring indigenous heritage," Kwok said, "and to recognize the

long and rich history of this land well before we arrived here." The task force was composed of McCormick, Steve Kalogeras, Mary McCosker, Janet Thomas, and Lafayette City Manager Niroop Srivatsa, who consulted with indigenous elders in the community. The acknowledgment reads: "We acknowledge that Lafayette is part of the unceded, ancestral homeland of the Bay Miwok people. The Bay Miwok and neighboring Ohlone people have lived in and moved through this place for thousands of years. They stewarded and shaped this land for hundreds of generations. We express our appreciation and gratitude for this profound legacy, which enhances and contributes to our lives to this day. We will strive to honor this land and strengthen our ties with the Indigenous communities that continue to live and work in our East Bay region as our neighbors and community members. We acknowledge and honor them and their ancestors, elders, and next seven generations."

According to Danielle Gallagher, the artwork reproduced on the utility wrap was painted by the artist Louis Choris in 1822. More information is available on the City of Lafayette website, at www.lovelafayette.org/why-lafayette/land-acknowledgment



Budget Process Update

By Lou Fancher

City Manager Niroop Srivatsa at the council's April 8 meeting provided a report on the city's goals and priorities set by council for the upcoming fiscal year. The updated report for FY 2024-25 followed a workshop held on March 24, at which a number of objectives and challenges were discussed. Three priorities were established at that workshop:

1. Develop a Fiscal Sustainability Plan for Short-term and Long-term needs.
2. Wildfire Prevention and Preparedness/Responsiveness and Utility Safety
3. Mt. Diablo Corridor/ Downtown Enhancement Plan

"All three of them are reiterations of your current year's priorities," Srivatsa said. "We ask you to confirm these are indeed your priorities. Then staff can use

your guidance to develop our budgets, look at the resources, and come back to you during the months of May and June for budget adoption."

David Clark offered public comment on the report, noting a missing element in the staff report about making Mt. Diablo Boulevard a "good street." On the overall enhancement plan, he asked for more specificity about elements such as signage or work on creek pathways, and a suggestion the work contributed by volunteers be mentioned in addition to staff time. A member of the public commenting virtually requested more details about making a main thoroughfare through the city, Mt. Diablo Boulevard, "multi modal." Pedestrian and vehicle traffic, parking, the pressure on emergency evacuation traffic,

and other factors, he suggested, should be carefully and thoroughly evaluated.

Mayor Gina Dawson responded, saying the issues had been discussed at the workshop and providing updated information on each item. "We're not looking to throttle the downtown," she said.

The report coming back to the council received comments to add the missing details, clarify specific language referencing the Mt. Diablo corridor, as well as several minor, but important additions to the wildfire protection practices, partnerships, and priorities.

The council voted unanimously to adopt the report and approved staff moving forward based on the priorities. Details on FY 2024-25 and the complete staff report can be found online at the city's website.

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Moraga to hold General Plan Community-Wide Meeting

By Vera Kochan

Looking ahead to the year 2040, the town has begun the process of updating its General Plan. The plan's purpose is to guide land use planning decisions.

Under state law, subdivisions, capital improvements, development agreements, and many other land use actions must be consistent with an adopted general plan. As a policy document, it establishes a town-wide vision and uniform direction for future development by reflecting the community's priorities and values, and by including supporting goals,

policies, and implementation measures to help elected officials, staff, residents, and local businesses achieve that vision.

"This project is part of the long range update as the current General Plan is over 20 years old," stated Moraga Planning Director Afshan Hamid. "The updates envision the next 10-15 years in terms of growth, opportunities, and challenges for the Town."

Hamid further explained, "The General Plan has seven mandatory elements: Land Use, Transportation, Housing, Safety, Conservation,

Open Space, and Noise. An additional county mandated element is Growth Management. The optional elements are Community Design, Community Services and Facilities, and Economic Vitality."

The town is inviting all members of the community to a General Plan 2040 workshop that will focus on four elements: Sustainability, Economic Vitality, Transportation, and Community Design. With regards to sustainability, the town will examine ways to create more resilient strategies for drought, storms, and

the protection of natural and built environments.

In terms of economic vitality, the town plans to discuss the two existing commercial centers and the opportunity for amenities, supporting local businesses, property owners, and strengthening the local economy.

The focus of the transportation element will be on the critical needs for all modes of transportation on Moraga's existing roadways and any improvements necessary to support the town's future growth.

Community design discussions will envision

place-making with new development, including public areas to shop, live, dine, and play, while focusing on small community design.

Hamid announced, "The community is invited to a Town wide workshop for early input and feedback being held at Saint Mary's College at Hagerty Lounge at De La Salle Building on April 30 from 5 to 7 p.m. Interactive stations will be set up for input and feedback. Please go to: make-moragahome.ca.us under Upcoming Events & Meetings for more information."

SMC holds community meeting to discuss proposed Athletic Field Lighting Project

By Vera Kochan

Saint Mary's College has plans to add lights to three of its athletic fields in order to introduce evening games to the campus. Anticipated to receive the new light installations are Saint Mary's Stadium (men's/women's soccer

and rugby), Br. Ronald Gallagher Stadium (baseball), and Cottrell Field (softball).

In order to inform the community and nearby residents of its plans and to answer any questions or concerns, SMC held an April 11 community meeting on campus, headed by various school personnel.

SMC Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics Mike Matoso got the ball rolling. "Having lights is crucial to the success of our program. It has an impact on recruiting and the overall experience of our student athletes." He also anticipates that it would increase game attendance, student enrollment, allow athletes' parents to attend more games, benefit local retail, and strengthen the town/gown relationship.

Saint Mary's Stadium, located beyond University Credit Union Pavilion, has seating for 5,500. It was originally constructed in 1973 for SMC's football games, until the program ended in 2004. Men's soccer season runs between August and November, with 11 home games. Women's soccer will have 10 home games. Men's rugby season is November through May with 10 home games, and women's rugby will have five home games. Minor League soccer runs April

through August with 10 home games. Not all soccer or rugby home games will be played in the evening.

SMC women's soccer coach Theresa Romagnolo stated, "We are one of the only schools in the WCC (West Coast Conference) that doesn't have lights. From an athletic side of things, it will draw a great crowd. It will reach more people if we play at night. It will be a different ball game."

The Br. Ronald Gallagher Stadium is located at the intersection of Saint Mary's Parkway and De La Salle Drive, near the front of the campus. The brand new stadium was opened in 2024, just 400 feet down the right field line from the old stadium location. Baseball season runs from February to May with a total of approximately 28 home games (not all of which will be played in the evening).

Cottrell Field, completed in 1999 and located at the intersection of Saint Mary's Parkway and Saint Mary's Road, was built almost entirely by the Saint Mary's Buildings and Grounds staff; in 2000, it was named as an NFCA (National Fastpitch Coaches Association) Regional Turf Field Winner. Softball season is February through May, and

there will be approximately 21 home games (not all of which will be played in the evening).

Approximately 10 residents from the immediate vicinity to the campus showed up for the presentation. Their major concern was over excessive lighting and noise. It was explained that LED lights would be installed and directed downward onto the fields in order to meet the Dark Sky Approved Outdoor Sports Lighting Program standards. Additionally, the lights would be turned on and off manually and not by automatic timers.

According to SMC's website, "Home games will start no later than 6:30 p.m. and end no later than 10 p.m. for the games played at the Saint Mary's Stadium and Cottrell Field. Home games at the Br. Ronald Gallagher Stadium will end no later than 11 p.m."

With regards to noise, the fields in question already have amplified sound systems in order to make announcements during the day games. While noise is expected from a cheering crowd, noisemakers, and air horns are currently prohibited during all of SMC's sporting events. Their website also states, "Vulgar and inappropriate language will not be tolerated during events,



Photo Vera Kochan

SMC's men's baseball field (one of three athletic fields anticipating light installment)

and SMC officials will eject any spectator, player, or coach who violates the rules."

Additionally, "Saint Mary's students are required to follow the Good Neighbor Policy and the Town of Moraga's Loud and Unruly Party Ordinance, and any students who violate these rules will be subject to Saint Mary's discipline process."

Several residents were skeptical of any actions taken with regards to over-excessive noise after having received no satisfaction from their complaints in recent years. The most common issue was that game announcements were heard throughout various nearby neighborhoods which stand in close proximity to the campus' sporting fields during day games. SMC Vice President of Facilities Services Isidro Farias assured res-

idents that going forward, complaints would be addressed.

The college doesn't anticipate any "significant traffic impacts" throughout the town as it expects more than half of the spectators to be students and Lamorinda locals. "If traffic before and after games becomes a problem as determined by the Town of Moraga, Saint Mary's will work with the Moraga Police Department to facilitate traffic control on game days."

SMC doesn't foresee problems with spillover parking, citing that large events, such as graduation ceremonies, have always been accommodated.

Some local business owners in attendance expressed excitement over the anticipation of evening games and what it could mean to Moraga in the form of spending dollars.

Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke and Council Member Renata Sos expect SMC will approach the Moraga Planning Commission next.

For more information visit: stmarys-ca.edu/athletic-lighting-project, or contact Farias at (925) 631-4150 or email: if5@stmarys-ca.edu.

Town Council Meetings
 Wed., April 24, 6:30 p.m.
 Wed., May 8, 6:30 p.m.
Planning Commission:
 Tuesday, May 7, 6:30 p.m.
Park and Recreation Commission: Monday, May 13, 6:30 p.m.

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Town Council approves revising Street Rehabilitation Cost Sharing Policy

By Vera Kochan

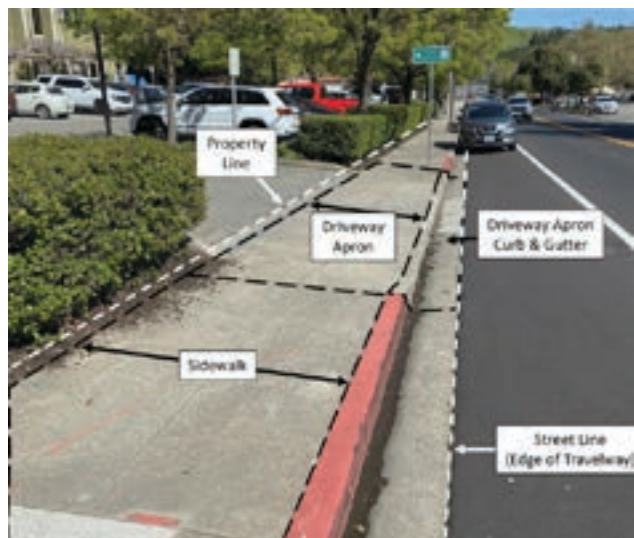


Photo courtesy Moraga Public Works Department

Examples of sidewalk terminology

When Moraga first began to see a housing boom in the 1960s, some sub-divisions included sidewalks, while others did not. The town itself did not construct the sidewalks - that decision was left up to the developer of the lots. Gutters, curbs, sidewalks, driveway aprons, pathways, trees, landscaping, and other front yard improvements from the roadway's edge to the property line are considered to be the public right-of-way (ROW), and any repairs and maintenance is the private property owner's responsibility. However, the town is responsible for the upkeep of its 58.59 centerline miles of asphalt-paved public streets.

Since Moraga's incorporation in 1974, the cost sharing policy has gone through a variety of iterations. According to Public Works Director/Town Engineer Shawn Knapp's April 10 staff report, between November 1974 to September 1977, there was a continuation of Contra Costa County policy whereby private property owners were responsible for maintaining the sidewalk area; in 1977, a Town Curb and Gutter Committee gave a "no change" recommendation; between Aug. 27, 1977 to Sept. 7, 1977, there was a policy shift for the town to be responsible for maintenance of gutters and curbs when determined to be a public hazard and the responsible party was not identified;

from 1977 to 1990, another policy shift allowed for "limited Town sidewalk area responsibility" whereby the town paid for the maintenance of gutters and curbs, unless they were damaged by others. Finally, via an adoption of Ordinance No.132 in 1990, policy shifted back to private property owners being responsible for maintaining the sidewalk area.

Knapp's report added that, between 1990 to 2012, the town's streets and infrastructure were continuing to deteriorate. In November 2012, voters approved of a local 1% Sales Tax Revenue Measure (Measure K), a general tax, to help improve and maintain the community's failing street network and other town needs; from 2013 to 2022, the town funded certain sidewalk area repairs that were part of street rehabilitation projects; between 2020 and 2022, there was additional clarification of private property owner sidewalk area maintenance and repair responsibilities. 2020 to 2024 saw the implementation of the "Worst First Residential Streets" approach, and with the Fiscal Year 2022-23, private property owners were held responsible for sidewalk area repairs that are part of street rehabilitation projects.

Staff began to identify \$361,645 in necessary sidewalk repairs prior to beginning the 2022 Street Rehabilitation Project, and as such,

provided each property owner with an option to either reimburse the town for repairs or hire their own contractor. By May 2023, the town entered into 116 reimbursement agreements with property owners which totaled \$349,015. To date, only \$132,100 has been collected, with another \$12,630 in repair work having been funded and completed separately by each property owner.

As the Street Rehabilitation Project got underway, many property owners objected to the Cost Sharing Policy, and the town stopped collection of the remaining \$216,915. Future street rehabilitation was put on hold while staff completed policy research.

Staff has recommended that the Municipal Code be amended to allow for use of public funding, which includes Measure K funds, to pay for those sidewalk repairs that would normally be the responsibility of property owners. The town would also reimburse those property owners who made repairs during FY 2022-23 (approximately \$144,730), and enter into agreements with each property owner to make certain that any future maintenance and repairs would fall to property owners.

Town Manager Scott Mitnick's slide presentation during the Town Council's April 10 meeting explained that the benefits of the new resolution would "reduce staff time spent on Reimbursement Agreements (saving up to \$150,000)", that there would be "more efficient use of staff time and increased focus on street projects" as well as an "increase in project implementation and decreased enforcement" that would promote a "positive relationship with property owners".

Mitnick pointed out additional benefits such as, "uniform high-quality sidewalk area repairs; safer sidewalks and increased ADA compliance; improved neighborhood connectivity,

aesthetics, and property values; and property owners would retain maintenance repair and legal liability."

The downside, according to Mitnick, would be the "reduction of \$309,000 to \$359,000 for street projects; less funding for other CIP projects and/or services; potential risk to the town; and possible confusion regarding how other sidewalk area repairs are funded."

The town council agreed to adopt a resolution revising the Town of Moraga's Street Rehabilitation Cost Sharing Policy to allow for the use of the town's Measure K Sales Tax funds to pay for sidewalk area repairs which are part of town street rehabilitation projects, while retaining private property owner obligations set forth in the Moraga Municipal Code pertaining to the public ROW. They also introduced an ordinance amending the Moraga Municipal Code Title 12, Chapter 12.04, Sidewalks, to incorporate the Revised Street Rehabilitation Cost Sharing Policy and other conforming amendments.

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Magical Monarchs Mini Poster Contest brings out the artist in JM's students

By Vera Kochan



Photo Vera Kochan

Monarch Poster Contest finalists and their well-wishers stand in front of the poster gallery at Moraga Library.

For the first time, the Moraga Garden Club/Moraga for Monarchs held a poster contest hoping to bring attention to the plight of the monarch butterflies by getting the students of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School to express themselves through art or poetry.

The object of the contest was to "create an informational poster for the general public, to help citizens of all ages understand the impor-

tance of monarch butterflies and the importance of Lamorinda supporting western monarch butterfly recovery."

Another mandate of the contest was to "create either a visual poster with original drawings and short captions OR a motivational poster written in poetry or essay format." Entries in both categories were allowed.

The poster paper's size had to be 9" by 12"

using a font of 20 or more. All work had to be original and send a "bright, friendly, upbeat" message. Any written entries had to be legible, and all entries had to be flat in order to fit into the display. To ensure fairness, no names were allowed on the entries. A Monarch Poster Academy was held by JM teacher Dawn Lezak to help students learn more about the monarchs and the message.

... continued on Page 12

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Chamber of Commerce:
www.orindachamber.org

The Orinda Association:
www.orindaassociation.org

City Council Regular Meeting:
Tuesday, April 30, 7 p.m.
Orinda Library Auditorium,
26 Orinda Way

Planning Commission
Tuesday, May 14, 7 p.m.
Orinda Library Auditorium,
26 Orinda Way

Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission
Wednesday,
May 8, 6:30 p.m.
Sarge Littlehale Community
Room, 22 Orinda Way

Resolution XX-24 establishing a parking variance In-Lieu fee holiday for AB 2097 projects fails

By Alison Burns

For decades, the overgrown lot at 25A Orinda Way has stood empty and neglected. But behind the boarded up windows, exciting plans have slowly been taking shape since June 14, 2022, when a new project was approved by Orinda's Planning Commission.

The Station, a state-of-the-art 18,287 square foot mixed-use building, owned by the Ugenti and Colen families, promises to be a "destination for guests and residents year-round" which will create an "everyday ecosystem for local and regional residents".

Orinda badly needs a commercial project like The Station to breathe life into the city and promote downtown development. With its Miche-

lin star restaurateur, 3,000 sf. of fitness space, family friendly fire pits, and second story executive offices, the complex promises to lure visitors from miles around.

There is only one fly in the ointment: no parking.

Originally, there were to be 80 subterranean parking bays, six "parklets", and room for at least five bicycles, but all these appear to have disappeared.

No matter — when a Californian commercial building fails to offer a safe place to leave your vehicle, its developers have to pay "parking variance in-lieu" fees.

Under the rates stipulated in the current Master Fee Schedule, The Station owes \$823,810 in Parking In-Lieu Fees,

which the City could deposit into a dedicated parking fund and expend as needed, either to increase the supply or reduce the demand for public or private parking.

On Jan. 1, 2023, mere months after the developers had committed to the six-figure Parking In-Lieu Fees, Assembly Bill 2097 came into effect, exempting most projects from having to provide minimum on-site parking if they were located within one-half mile from a major transit stop. This would obviously apply to The Station, given its proximity to BART. Hypothetically, the developers could start over and submit their project for re-approval, it would doubtless involve other

costs and substantially delay construction.

Their hope was that at the April 16 City Council Meeting, approval would be granted for Resolution XX-24 Establishing a Parking Variance In-Lieu Fee Holiday for AB 2097 Projects, allowing the project to continue as planned, without having to pay the obligatory \$823,810.

The Resolution was hotly debated at the Council Meeting on April 16, involving three time extensions late into the night, until finally ending at 11 p.m.

The result came in at two ayes (Iverson and Riley) and three no's (Gee, Miller and Malkani).

The motion was not carried.

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Surrounded by just a fraction of the volunteers who regularly help out at the Orinda Baseball Association (OBA), Bob Hegarty is pictured on April 16 receiving a proclamation from Mayor Darlene Gee in honor of the OBA's 40th anniversary. With over 350 Orinda children participating in the Spring and Fall leagues each year, it is estimated that more than 10,000 young players have participated in the OBA program since 1984. In recognition of the generations of Orindans whose lives have been enriched by what Hegarty started in the eighties, the baseball field at Del Ray Elementary school will henceforth be known as Bob Hegarty Field. - A.Burns



Photo Alison Burns

Subcommittee tackles infrastructure and drainage problems for private roads

By Alison Burns

It was standing room only in the Sarge Littlehale Community Room on April 17 when Mayor Darlene Gee and Vice Mayor Latika Malkani headed the first meeting of a newly-formed ad-hoc Infrastructure Subcommittee. The plan was to evaluate the various options available for integrating and maintaining the community infrastructure and drainage on Orinda's many private roads.

Gee — who is a Civil Engineer by profession — opened the meeting by admitting that the current situation comprises "a long series of problems that are not easy to solve", but added that she is "a strong believer that just because it's not easy [doesn't mean] we shouldn't be working on it".

She said that in the past, the City had spent "quite a bit of time talking about private roads, but we've never really spent so much time talking about private drainage, which is every bit of challenge for you and your neighbors".

In a space of just four weeks, prior to the meeting, the City had received over 60 letters of complaint, all echoing the same theme: that Orinda residents living on private streets, who already contribute regular taxes, should not have to pay additional tens of thousands of dollars to maintain their road surfaces and drains.

Many of the complaints were directed at services like Central San and EBMUD, who enjoy easements on private roads, and "will dig up and ruin our road as they see fit", according to Rachel Burge, yet do not contribute to the cost of the damage they cause.

According to former Mayor Dennis Fay (a retired transportation engineer), the average home generates five car trips a day. By contrast, one heavy garbage/recycle truck has the same effect as 9,000 car trips, which means that three trucks making their weekly run will impact streets with the equivalent of 27,000 car trips

Steve Cohn, who has long been very vocal about this inequality, spoke for a group known as Orindans for Fair Road Funding. Their website questions why 20% of Orinda's homeowners and taxpayers are unable to access the same services as their neighbors on public roads.

The gulf between private and public streets began in the mid-1920s, when tracts of land were subdivided and developed into residential lots. Over time, some streets were established as "public", but even when Orinda became incorporated in 1985, almost one third of its 85 miles of residential streets were still regarded as private.

Gradually, a two-class road system

evolved: providing publicly funded access to 5,500 of Orinda's residents right up to their driveways, while denying that same benefit to the remaining 1,500 homeowners. The phrase "second class citizens" was heard throughout the meeting.

When Gee asked how many newcomers actually realized they were buying a house on a private road, a large number of hands shot up into the air, to the surprise of onlookers.

It turns out that realtors are not obligated to disclose that their clients are about to sink their savings into underwriting the cost of repairing a road that might well throw up long-established drainage issues or even sinkholes, potholes, and landslides.

At the end of what Gee called the evening's "robust conversation", both Councilors said they had listened to everyone in the room and were wholly committed to finding a solution to what had long been "a very problematic issue".

At present, the subcommittee is expected to be in existence until December 2024, but this can be extended until a work plan and proposal have been submitted to the City Council.

An audio recording of the meeting is available at orinda.igmp2.com

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New OIS Buildings Foster Supportive Student Culture

By Emma Wong



Photos Emma Wong

The OIS Student Services Building, located directly right of the traffic circle.

On a bright May morning, eighth-grader Sophie Baker will be among an eager crowd filing into Orinda Intermediate School's brand-new Student Center. Featuring a slanted roof and amphitheater steps, the center is one aspect of OIS's broad renovation project, set to open next month with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Boasting a reception, staff lounge, administrative room, and Student Center, the complex will modernize the OIS campus and address prior limitations. With outdoor seating saturated during lunchtime, many Bulldogs wished for an indoor gathering space. "In sixth grade, we had to eat lunch in the

breezeways because the tables were too crowded," Baker said. "I thought we needed more indoor spaces. One friend group usually couldn't fit at a table." Additionally, staff sought space to hold meetings, previously adapting to the library or classrooms. These improvements were goals to address for Principal Stacy Wayne, who oversaw the construction process. "[We hoped for a] new area to enable us to hold gatherings, since we lacked room in the past," Wayne said. Fortunately, in 2018, municipal measures E and I provided over \$100 million to construct modern facilities across the Orinda Union School District (OUSD). With necessary funds, OIS

bulldozed old buildings two years ago, at the start of Baker's middle school career. "I remember the construction starting at the end of sixth grade," Baker said. "I feel like it's been going on for so long, so I'm looking forward to using the whole building." Principal Wayne designed the complex layout to fit students' and staff's needs. The conference room, with its large wooden table and marble countertops, provides a spacious area for stakeholder meetings. The reception and main office, previously located in a hallway, are now at the front of the school, providing increased visibility for new parents. An intriguing devel-

opment comes with the Student Services building next to the front gym. Also called the Wellness Center, the spacious room mirrors facilities provided by Miramonte High School that foster a safe space, where staff provide therapeutic services to students in need.

Beyond accommodating student emotional health, the Student Services building also provides the indoor social hotspot that Bulldogs have been yearning for. "Out of all the new rooms, I'm most excited to use the Student Center," eighth-grader Palig Horoupan said. "It's a cozy place that looks great for hanging out. I'll be checking it out with all my friends before we go to high school."

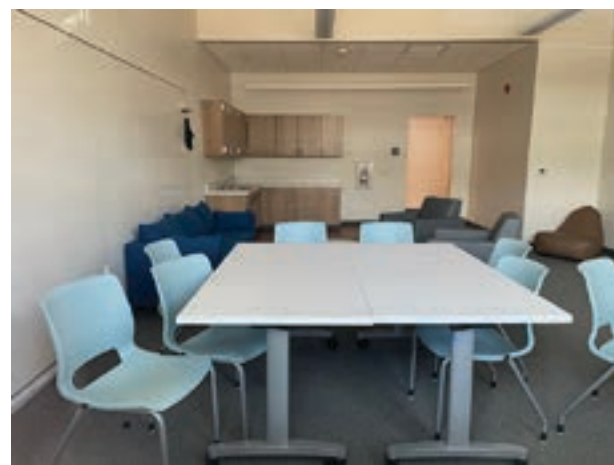
Baker signed up to be an office aide for one of her electives. After the complex opens, she will greet parents and take calls in the new administrative room. "It'll be cool to work there: we'll do lots of things, including delivering items to classes and just helping around," Baker said. "I'm also looking forward to spending time there when I need it." As the eighth-graders move toward graduation, they hope that the next generation of Bulldogs can fully enjoy the renovated cam-

pus. "These buildings provide a great experience for incoming sixth-graders," Baker said. "I think the Wellness Center especially will help out a lot of people at this school."

Wayne hopes that the renovation will further OIS' goal of foster-

ing an environment "where everybody belongs."

"I'm looking forward to having a centralized hub for our community," Wayne said. "We want people to have a positive first impression of our amazing school!"



Student Center, a cozy place for hanging out.

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Roasted Cauliflower Salad with Radicchio, Cranberries, Pepitas, and Goat Cheese

By Susie Iventosch

This colorful salad is made with a delightful combination of flavors and textures, featuring roasted orange cauliflower, sweet, dried cranberries, slightly bitter radicchio, crunchy salted pepitas, and creamy goat cheese. It's all tossed together in a light and tangy Champagne vinaigrette and is the perfect balance of savory, sweet, tangy, and salty elements.

Cauliflower comes in a variety of colors, and you can make this

dish with whichever you like best. I am partial to the beautiful orange, or what they call "cheddar" cauliflower. The color comes from a genetic mutation (not genetically modified) that allows the plant to store extra beta-carotene. Orange cauliflower has 25% more vitamin A than the more common white variety. If you look at purple cauliflower, that color comes from the antioxidant anthocyanin, found in red cabbage, radicchio,

and red wine. Purple cauliflower is also an excellent source of Vitamin C. So, overall, colorful cauliflower is not only beautiful, but healthier, too!

We usually roast our cauliflower before using it in recipes; it really brings out the flavor and sweetness, plus it looks so good. Tossed in a little bit of olive oil and your favorite seasonings, it's a great veggie dish all by itself, but it's also fantastic mashed and used in

place of potatoes, or tossed in a salad like this recipe. We especially love this salad with Champagne or Prosecco vinaigrette, but if you don't have either in your pantry, white wine vinegar works well too. For a little variety, replace the pepitas with roasted pistachios or toasted pecans.

"I like to roast the cauliflower a day or two ahead of time to make it quicker and easier to assemble the salad when I'm ready. My



Roasted Cauliflower Salad

Photos Susie Iventosch

family prefers a slightly tangy salad dressing, so we like to go light on the olive oil, but if you prefer it a little less tangy,

then simply add more olive oil, a tablespoon at a time, until you reach the desired taste."

Salad Ingredients

- 1 head orange cauliflower
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 tsp. lemon pepper (or salt and pepper)
- 3/4 cup roasted & salted pepitas (can use pistachios or pecans)
- 3/4 cup dried cranberries
- 4 oz. goat cheese, crumbled
- 1 cup finely shredded or thinly sliced radicchio
- 1 head romaine lettuce
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Champagne Vinaigrette
- 1/4 cup Champagne vinegar (or Prosecco vinegar)
- 1/2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/8 tsp. white pepper
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1 small shallot finely diced, and sautéed if you prefer it cooked

DIRECTIONS

Prepare Cauliflower/Salad

Preheat oven to 425°F. Spray a baking sheet with cooking spray. Set aside.

Clean and cut the head of cauliflower into florets. Toss with olive oil and season with lemon pepper, or salt and pepper.

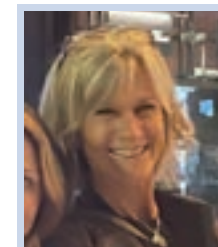
Lay the florets out onto the prepared baking sheet. Roast for about 20-25 minutes, or until the cauliflower is just beginning to brown and is knife tender, but still al dente. Remove from oven and cool. Cut into bite-sized pieces. This step can be done a day or two ahead of time.

Meanwhile, make dressing (recipe below), slice the radicchio, and clean and tear Romaine into bite-size pieces. Set aside.

When ready to serve, toss roasted cauliflower with radicchio, cranberries, pepitas, and goat cheese. Toss in vinaigrette and serve over a bed of romaine.

Champagne Vinaigrette

Finely dice shallots. If you like them raw, then add them with the rest of the ingredients to a container with a tight-fitting lid. If you prefer them sautéed or even caramelized, then cook them in a little bit of olive oil until desired doneness, and then add them to the remaining ingredients. Shake well.



Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977. Or visit <https://treksandbites.com>

Coach's Corner



Welcome to Coach's Corner, where Advantage College Planning addresses questions asked by local student families. If you have a question you'd like us to address, please email us eastbay@advcp.com.

Question: My daughter was accepted to Washington University. She'd love to attend but they did not give us enough financial aid. Do you have any suggestions?

Thank you for asking this question. Surprisingly, colleges and auto dealerships share one commonality: the first offer is often not the final offer; if you ask for a better deal, you'll probably get one! And if you mention a stronger offer from a different institution, the college (or dealership) may improve their aid even further. I worked with a student who emailed ever-increasing financial aid offers between two competing schools. It saved her a lot of money. The takeaway: negotiate (respectfully) with your college's financial aid department.

Question: My son (sophomore) is planning to spend the summer studying for the SAT... at least, that's what he tells me. How would you recommend that he spend his summer?

Hi! This is a great question! We recommend sophomores practice the SAT or ACT for one hour a day, five days a week. If a student wants to study more—great! But most do not. Minus a few hours per week on SAT prep, your son has his entire summer ahead of him. I would recommend a few activities: work, community college and volunteering.

1) Work experience. I recommend working 15-40 hours a week. A job is beneficial in many ways - students learn how to work with others, take feedback, manage money, etc. It also looks great on college applications. When applying to college, many of my students write about their summer jobs.

2) Community college. He should sign up for a CC class (or two!) in a subject that interests him. Colleges look for intellectually curious students; many colleges actually score students on their intellectual curiosity ("IC") and one of the best ways to score highly is to take interesting classes. I highly recommend that students take one or two community college classes between grades 10 and 11 and again between grades 11 and 12. These classes should be taken for college credit and should be in person if possible (online classes aren't always accepted by non-UCs/CSUs for credit).

3) Volunteering and pursuing a passion are also important. I recommend a regular, year-round commitment to a cause that your student believes in. Two hours a month (or more) is great! It is critical that students genuinely believe in their cause and volunteer consistently. If they don't love their volunteer experience, find another use of their time.

We'll be back next month with more Q&A!



OUR CONTACT INFO

Looking Good in Lamorinda

Femininity is the theme this spring

By Moya Stone



Photos Moya Stone

Shirtwaist dress in spring print at J.McLaughlin.

What's exciting about the start of a new season? Besides a shift in the weather, it's the thought of new fashions. Femininity is the theme for spring 2024; on the runways designers were loving lace, bows, sheer fabrics, and long dresses. Elle magazine says, "the sweet aesthetic will reign supreme this spring." Other trends that I'm excited about include striped T-shirts and polo shirts. Both tops work well casually with shorts or more dressed-up with the classic pencil skirt. For an extra fashion punch, pair the polo with a scarf.



Wicker and leather handbags are available at J.McLaughlin.

Patty Giammona, Assistant Store Manager at J.McLaughlin in Lafayette, filled me in on what's big this season: "Vibrant florals, statement accessories, and natural hued sandals that go with everything." When I recently popped into the store, Sales Associate Michele Nagel showed me, around pointing out new items for spring including wide-leg jeans, floral print blouses, and wicker handbags. They have a selection of shirt-waist dresses in interesting prints (with pockets!), which are great for summer travel. Belts continue to be an important accent piece and J.McLaughlin has raffia belts in spring-friendly colors: navy blue, yellow, and orange. Put together a new spring ensemble and head over to the de Young Museum to view their current exhibition Fashioning San Francisco: A Century of Style. A smash hit since its

opening in January, this exhibit features over 100 couture and high fashion pieces worn by prominent SF Bay Area women. More than fifty designers are represented including Jeanne Lanvin, Rei Kawakubo, Christian Dior, Vivienne Westwood, Christopher John Rogers, and Alexander McQueen, just to name a few. Fashioning San Francisco is divided into seven sections that smoothly transition from one to the next. Something new (at least to me) is the use of two levels of mannequin displays, called - balconies - one on top of the other. I liked the simplicity and use of space, plus it felt fresh while offered viewing from a distance. Also new and great fun is Snap AR Activation, which allows attendees to "try on" some of the couture in the exhibit. Stand in front of a screen and like magic it will drape your reflection in a beautiful gown. (Don't miss it - it's located downstairs from the main exhibit.) Fashioning San Francisco: A Century of Style is on now through Aug. 11.

I was saddened to hear that Macy's in Union Square is closing. What a void that will leave both in the downtown area and in many hearts. Macy's was my go-to department store when I was in high school. One summer I worked part-time in the Juniors Fashion Department ironing the new stock before it went out on the floor. I got a kick out of being behind the scenes where some of the back stock was kept and where models tried things on for fashion shows. (There are lots of stories like mine in Lost Department Stores of San Francisco (The History

Press) by Anne Evers Hitz, a fifth-generation San Franciscan. In her book, Hitz tells about the rise and fall of some of the prominent downtown department stores, including the Emporium, The White House, The City of Paris, I. Magnin, and Joseph Magnin, among others. She digs deep into the history of each store, covering when each opened, what made it successful, and what contributed to its decline. I particularly enjoyed all the stories she includes from former employees and customers.

Finally, congratulations to Assistance League Thrift Shop in Lafayette who won "Best Thrift Shop" in The East Bay Times. Stop by and see what fashionable treasure you might find for your spring wardrobe.

Enjoy the new season and go forth in style.

Moya Stone is a fashion writer and blogger at www.overdressedforlife.com



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Not to be missed

Art

ART CRAWL! April 27 from 1 to 3 p.m. at St. Mary's College Museum. Crawl is an event in conjunction with Moraga Art in Public Spaces and SMC Museum. It will be held on SMC campus. Artists of high school age and artists from the community are invited to join the fun.

The Lafayette Public Art Committee showcases the mesmerizing world of painter Michael Robinson in the exhibition, "The Spirits of Babylon", at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Immerse yourself in his works' vibrant hues and enigmatic symbolism. From abstract figurative to modern surrealist styles, Robinson's artwork reflects the influences of Kandinsky, Miro, Warhol, Klee, and Basquiat. The exhibit runs through May 19 and is open to the public during library hours. Admission is free. 3491 Mt Diablo Blvd, Lafayette.

Art Gallery at Wilder: Artistic License - A Couple of Artists Married to Art. The exhibit runs April 7 to May 5. The Gallery is now open Monday - Friday from 3 to 5 p.m.; new art is exhibited monthly. For more information or to apply to exhibit work, visit <https://lamorindaarts.org/current-exhibits-wilder/>, info@LamorindaArts.org (925) 359-9940

10th Congressional District Annual High School Art Competition and Exhibition Reception will be held at the Moraga Art Gallery on Friday, May 3 from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Each year Congressman Mark DeSaulnier hosts the 10th Congressional District High School Art Competition and Exhibition, which includes Lamorinda. The competition is open to public, private, and home-schooled students. The

event will culminate in a closing awards event with awards presented by the Congressman. The Congressional district's first place winner will be invited to visit Washington, D.C. where the chosen work will be displayed for a year in the U.S. Capitol. The Gallery is located at 432 Center Street in the Rheem Shopping Center. For more information, visit moragaartgallery.com or call (925) 376-5407.

"Ekphrasis Exhibition 2024" opens April 29 at the Art Gallery at the Orinda Library. Please joins for Recitations & Slide Show on Saturday, May 4, from 1:30 to 2:45 p.m. in the Library Auditorium, with an artist reception to follow on the Patio from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Orinda Books Artist of the Month in April is Freddy Moran. Freddy is an internationally recognized, award-winning fabric artist whose work is highly sought after by collectors. Her exhibition displays colorful, riotous portraits. For a preview, visit www.orindabooks.com.

Music

Berkeley Chamber Performances (BCP) is presenting three chamber music concerts at the Lafayette Library, GCCP's former venue. Their final concert of the season features the Naumburg Prize-winning Telegraph Quartet on May 4, featuring string quartets by Fanny Mendelssohn, Kenji Bunch, and Dvorak. All concerts are Saturday evenings at 7:30 p.m. and tickets are \$45, with a significant discount for season ticket purchase. www.berkeleychamberperform.org

The Saint Mary's College Guild is holding its annual Spring Concert in the Soda

Center on campus on Tuesday, May 14 at 11 a.m. A formal luncheon will be served (select chicken forestier or butternut ravioli) \$55 each. Entertainment by Double Treble, Dean Boysen and Christy Diggins. Send name, email, check payable to SMC Guild, c/o Cook, 4461 Alhambra Way, Martinez, CA 94553. Questions? Call (925) 229-2665.

Young People's Symphony Orchestra 87th Spring Concert is on Saturday, April 27 at 7:30 p.m. at First Church Berkeley (2345 Channing Way, Berkeley). The concert program will include two iconic pieces: Gershwin's An American in Paris and Stravinsky's "The Firebird" Suite (1945 version). Tickets: General \$20, students free (must register) www.ypsomusic.org/events Mask-optional. YPSO will also host a free open dress rehearsal program on Friday April 26, from 6 to 9:30 p.m. for young children accompanied by an adult, school groups, and senior citizens. Register at tinyurl.com/ypso-open-rehearsal

LOPC is excited to host "Sounds of Spring: Music and Vocals" on May 3 at 7:30 p.m. in the church sanctuary. The program and talent is exceptional, with 16 Grammy awards among them. This unforgettable night will showcase music from all genres, highlighting performers from Santana, Steely Dan, the Dave Matthews Band, and the Blues Brothers, among others. For details, performer bios, and tickets, please visit lopc.org/tickets. There is a suggested donation of \$30 and all net proceeds will go toward the purchase of musical instruments for Children of Faith Missions in India. Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, 49 Knox Drive, Lafayette.

Not to be missed

The Diablo Women's Chorale present "A Lovely Way to Spend an Evening." They blend nostalgia with contemporary flair and perform with live musicians, including the Stephen Evans Cello Choir with Joe Magdalena II. The concerts will be held on Saturday, May 18, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, May 19, at 3 p.m. at Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church, Bortin Hall 55 Eckley Lane, Walnut Creek. Advance tickets at diablowomenschorale.org.

St. Paul's Concert Series is excited to host MUSAE Treble Vocal Ensemble as their featured performing group in their concert on May 4. at 7 p.m. at 1924 Trinity Avenue, Walnut Creek. Online broadcast: visit stpaulswc.org/concert-series and program. Donations graciously accepted at the door (avg. \$20/\$10 Students) and in our online registration. All are welcome regardless of donation! (925) 934-2324, <https://stpaulswc.org/concert-series/>

Theatre

New Voices Series: Lucia Fuentes at Town Hall Theatre. June 14, 15, and 21 at 7 p.m., and June 22 at 2 p.m. Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School Street, Lafayette. TICKETS: \$20, Pay-What-You-Can tickets available at the door (subject to availability). www.townhalltheatre.com/lucia-fuentes

Bay Area Comics presents a Stand-up Comedy Showcase of the TOP independent comedians. Event: Laugh-ayette Standup Comedy Show at Town Hall Theatre 3535 School St. Lafayette on Thursday May 2. from 7 to 9 p.m. Ticket link: www.bayareacomics.com/event/laugh-ayette-town-hall-theatre/

Not to be missed

Literature

Join Reasonable Books on May 11 from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. as local author & Mystery Writers of America NorCal president, Claire Johnson will interview local author Michael J Cooper about his prize-winning historical mystery, Wages of Empire. 3645 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette Free event with refreshments. For further details re: book, visit <https://michaeljcooper.net/> For venue details: Reasonable Books: <https://reasonable.online/>

Poetry for the Ages: Tuesday, April 30, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School Street, Lafayette. Celebrate National Poetry Month with a Spring-themed salon-style poetry reading sponsored by the Lafayette Public Art Committee. Bring your own lunch and immerse yourself in the ambiance of a welcoming literary salon. Free event with limited space. Register by emailing rosen@love-lafayette.org. For more information or to apply to read as a poet visit www.lovelafayette.org/PublicArt

Other

The 25th Annual Lafayette Juniors Lifestyle Tour will take place on May 4 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more than twenty years, The Lifestyle Tour presented by Lafayette Juniors has continued to be one of Lamorinda's most beloved events and the Juniors' largest fundraiser. The Lafayette Lifestyle Tour (formerly known as The Kitchen Tour) is a self-guided tour featuring beautiful Lafayette homes with masterfully designed, unique and awe-inspiring indoor and outdoor spaces. Tickets are available at www.Lafayettejuniors.org.

Health Care for All - Contra Costa and Alameda County Chapters invites the public to a presentation and discussion about current healthcare costs, quality, equity, access, and remedies for our healthcare system's problems. May 9, 7 to 8:30 p.m., Lafayette Library and Learning Center Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette, registration appreciated tinyurl.com/HCAMay

Lafayette Artisan Walk Saturday, May 11 from 1 to 4 p.m. Walk through downtown with family & friends, shop local, support local! The Lafayette Chamber's Retail sub-committee is excited to announce and promote Lafayette's local businesses and local artists. Businesses throughout Lafayette will be showcasing local artisan items - perfect gifts for upcoming occasions - Mother's Day, Graduation, Father's Day.

Please submit events to: calendar@lamorindaweekly.com

Lamorinda Weekly

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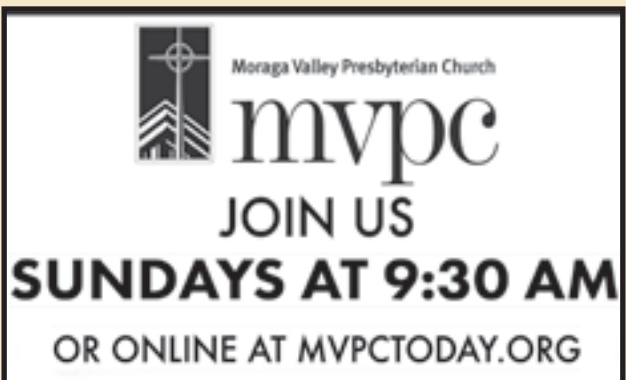
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Wednesday 10 am Contemplative Worship in the Chapel



AAUW OML's Successful STEM conference reaches 36 schools in the Bay Area

Submitted by Renee Rosado



Photo provided

Last month the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Orinda-Moraga-Lafayette (OML) branch held their eighth Annual STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Math) conference at St. Mary's College.

It was an exciting day as the conference played host to 169 young female students from sixth, seventh, and eighth grades from 36 different schools and 33 cities in the Bay Area.

The purpose of this conference was to introduce these young girls to the science, technology, engineering, and math fields such that they

could be empowered and make decisions about moving forward in one of these fields. Many of these young attendees already showed interest in specific areas and were planning for a future education in these fields.

An important aspect of this conference was the opportunity for the young attendees to see, first hand, that there are others like themselves with the same interests and goals and that their dreams can become a reality in the STEM fields.

12 female subject matter experts presented workshops, including:

chemistry, engineering, the human brain, architecture, and experiments in space, to name a few of the 12 subjects presented.

Each student selected three different STEM subjects and participated in hands on workshops during this one-day conference.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Sonya M. Shuh from St. Mary's College's Biology department, who has an extensive background in research in the areas of reproductive and developmental biology, and toxicology. Dr. Shuh also discussed her educational journey and challenges in becoming a doctor in the field of biology. She encouraged attendees not to give up on their dreams and not to take "no" for an answer.

Aside from learning about the various STEM fields, the attendees mingled with others of the same age and same interests and began to network while sharing their goals and interests.

This conference was made available by the AAUW OML team members' various fundraising activities throughout last year, as well as the generous donations from St. Mary's College, local rotaries, and Kiwanis clubs in the Lamorinda area.

In Memory

Arif Yar Khan

July 8, 1935 - November 30, 2023



Mr. Arif Yar Khan, 88, died peacefully at John Muir hospital in Walnut Creek surrounded by family. Arif was born in Dehradun, India and migrated to Pakistan in 1947 with his family. He received his Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering in Pakistan, and then won a Pakistan Petroleum Ltd. scholarship to study Mechanical Engineering at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom.

Arif was part of the senior management team at Sui Gas Transmission Company Limited in Pakistan. After being hired by Williams Brothers he relocated to Tulsa, Oklahoma. His career spanned over fifty-eight years as his expertise in oil and gas exploration, natural gas processing plants, and pipeline design was always in demand worldwide. For Williams Brothers, and later the Fluor Corporation, he managed multi-national

multi-million-dollar projects in Canada, Colombia, Iran, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. He truly enjoyed his career, learning every aspect of it; he even received an Arctic Engineering certification from the University of Alaska. Although Arif traveled extensively because of his career he returned to Moraga after his retirement because he loved his semi-rural "vibe". He always hoped it would not be aggressively developed like other East Bay cities.

Aside from his dedication to his career, Arif will be remembered by his family and friends for his immeasurable generosity, kindness, and sincerity. Although he lost his mother when he was only seven years old, he was very close to his father who died battling cancer when Arif was 18 years old. After graduating from college, Arif supported his siblings for many years as a promise to his father. Besides his love of engineering, Arif was gifted in telling dramatic stories, learning languages and singing; he greatly enjoyed the arts, history, and soccer. He was genuinely religious. His family and friends miss him dearly - every day.

He is survived by his wife, Kaiser, and his children Nabeela (Faheem), Erum, Omar (Uzma), and Obaid (Sophia), as well as five grandchildren, and four siblings.

Earth Day Event Hosted by Troop 200G

Submitted by Nia Ho



Photo provided

From left: Nia H., Mila N., Leah V., Emiko K., Tiffany H., Gabrielle P., Scoutmaster Ho, Tina Y.

Troop200G organized a successful sneaker drive at the Earth Day Celebration in Lafayette. Over 100 pairs of shoes were collected by the girls

from folks around the Bay Area. Driven by service to the community, Scouts BSA Troop 200 is co-ed and is involved in multiple adventure activities, including scuba diving, rock climbing, week-long canoeing, and multi-miler backpacking, and is active with various summer camps. T200G of the greater Troop200 is based in Lafayette and meets at Our Saviours Lutheran Church, 1035 Carol Lane. Come and check us out at 7 p.m. on Tuesday evenings, and please bring your sneakers to donate on April 23. Donations go toward saving the mighty giants - The Redwood Trees. Help us save the Redwoods one shoe at a time - T200G of Lafayette, California. Contact us at troop200bg@gmail.com

In Memory

Jack Ray Bontemps

May 25, 1938 - Feb. 27, 2024



Long-time Orinda resident Jack Ray Bontemps passed away on February 27, 2024, after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's disease. He was 85.

Jack was born on May 25, 1938, in Seattle, WA, to Ray J. Bontemps and Ruth L. Bontemps (née Grant). He grew up throughout the Northwest, attending the University of Washington and obtaining a B.S. in Chemical Engineering. He was recruited by Standard Oil of California (Chevron), where he spent his career in a variety of executive positions.

Jack arrived in Lamorinda with his young family in 1961 and over the years volunteered with many local organizations, serving on the board of the Mount Diablo Silverado Council of the Boy Scouts of America and as President of the Orinda Parks and Recreation Foundation where he helped establish the 12-acre Orinda Oaks Park and the

110-acre Orinda Open Space Preserve. As President of the Rotary Club of Orinda, Jack led the effort to bring lights to the Wilder Playfields, enabling local teams greater opportunity to play recreational sports. Jack also participated on the Advisory Board for the Lawrence Hall of Science and served from 2006-2010 on the Board of Directors for the Orinda Union School District.

Jack loved jazz and was an accomplished saxophone player, establishing his own bands in high school and college where he played school dances and fraternity socials. An avid tennis player, Jack was also an outdoorsman who loved spending his spare time hiking the Sierras or enjoying the north coast and the beautiful home he built at The Sea Ranch. Family and friends loved his quick wit, his positive outlook, his debonair style and, above all, his willingness to lend a hand when needed. He was a man of great faith and integrity, and he loved his family fiercely.

He is survived by his beloved wife and partner of forty-three years, Barbara; three sons of whom he was immensely proud: Doug Bontemps (Stephanie) of Lafayette, Todd Bontemps of Pleasanton; Jackson Evan Bontemps (Anna) of Oakland; and by his treasured grandchildren: Andrew Bontemps (Alena) of Denver, CO, Greg Bontemps (Claudia) of Emeryville, Sondrine Bontemps of New York, NY, and Austin Bontemps, Minneapolis, MN.

A Celebration of Life will be held on May 11th. For information, contact: jackbontempscelebration@gmail.com. Gifts in Memoriam can be made to: The Rotary Club of Orinda Endowment Fund, PO Box 44, Orinda, CA, 94563; or to the Alzheimer's Association of Northern CA.

Community Service: We are pleased to make space available whenever possible for some of Lamorinda's dedicated community service organizations to submit news and information about their activities. Submissions may be sent to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com with the subject header In Service to the Community.

Share Your Celebrations and Remembrances

If you would like to share an announcement about a special event or achievement, such as a wedding, engagement, scholarship or graduation of a local resident, or about a special person from Lamorinda who has passed, send a photo along with your text (up to 200 words) to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com, and include "Celebrations or Remembrances" in the subject line.

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Moraga examines economic vitality, contrasts with Lafayette and Orinda

By Lou Fancher

A Draft General Plan Economic Vitality White Paper and proposed economic development policies prepared for Moraga's General Plan 2040 offers valuable information specific to the town, as well as intriguing comparisons to Lafayette and Orinda. Dated March 20 and submitted by Planning Director Afshan Hamid and consultant Barry Miller to the town council and planning commission, staff sought input and feedback on the report. State law dictates mandatory elements and requires updates for all municipal General Plans, along with allowing for the addition of "optional" components, such as the economic vitality overview Moraga's planners developed in response to key priorities expressed in a resident survey the town completed during the sixth cycle Housing Element process.

As stated, the White Paper holds vital information and warrants close reading by the town's members with stake in the game: Moraga residents, workers, employers, business owners, commercial and residential property owners, town government officials, and others. For purposes of this article, the lens widens to draw out a few of the comparisons the report makes between Moraga and its two neighboring Lamorinda cities. The information the White

Paper's data and narrative highlight when noting the important contrasts and similarities throughout the region can be extrapolated and used beyond the town's geographic borders.

Beginning with sales tax revenues per capita, the report shows the decline in the last seven years is common to Moraga, Lafayette, and Orinda. The report breaks down sales tax revenues in Moraga and shows that relative to Lafayette and Orinda, Moraga receives much less of its sales tax from food and beverage stores and restaurants, and more from clothing/accessories and gasoline stations.

Moraga gathered data from EnviroNics Analytics pertaining to "retail leakage" based on modeling consumer behavior and estimating the gap between retail supply and demand in given marketplaces. Comparisons showed all three communities could conceivably support more retail activity and are "leaking" retail spending to other cities. In Lamorinda, Orinda is capturing the smallest share of local spending (26%), followed by Moraga (33%) and Lafayette (45%). In terms of volume, the greatest leakage gaps are in motor vehicle and parts dealers, food and beverage stores, general merchandise, and food service and drinking places. The data is most useful

in revealing sectors where expansion would mirror locational needs of businesses in that town or city and logically, might indicate the most successful ventures.

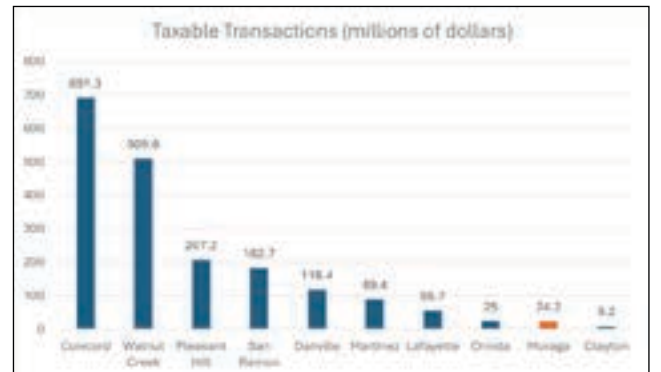
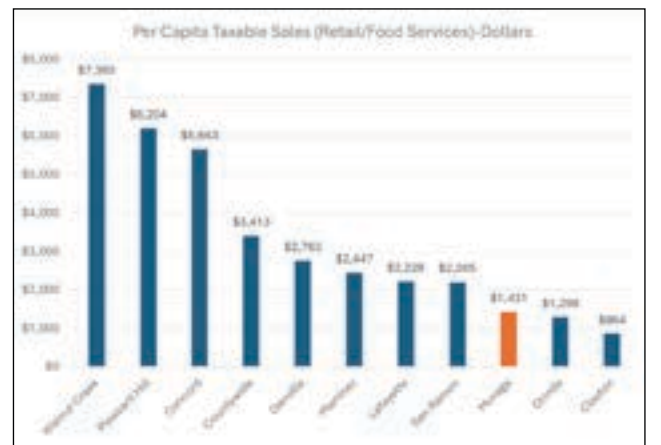
Another category, median household income in 2022, establishes Moraga at \$193,707, Lafayette higher at \$219,250 and Orinda rising to the top position at over \$250,000. "Collectively, the three cities have roughly 60,000 residents and form one of the East Bay's Area's most affluent submarkets," the report states. About the cost of residential property, it says, "Home prices in Moraga are among the highest in Contra Costa County, though they lag Orinda and Lafayette slightly. Zillow reports the average sales price in 2023 was \$1,696,000 in Moraga, \$1,843,710 in Lafayette, and \$1,936,485 in Orinda. All of these figures are more than twice the countywide average of \$793,190."

The White Paper has an extensive examination of commercial property profiles and emphasizes the necessity of a town or city to support investors, developers, owners and tenants with issues such as financing, permitting, dealing with aging infrastructure, establishing utility connections,

and more. Placemaking and storytelling enter the picture upon inviting residents to offer input on the priorities unique to the community. Because Moraga is geographically more isolated than Lafayette and Orinda and is not on the BART line, for example, certain services are more or less in demand. With their more direct access, Lamorinda's two cities might consider commercial development projects with specific appeal centered on a different demographic baseline than Moraga planners utilize.

The report ends with outlines for five goals and specific policies aimed at raising the economic vitality of Moraga. Again, the items stand as strong recommendations for any community aspiring to improve and stabilize its economic base in 2024 and beyond. The five goals are for Moraga, but adding "Lafayette" and "Orinda" to each phrase could form a blueprint for the entire Lamorinda community:

1. Maintain a business-friendly environment



that supports investment in Moraga.

2. Attract new businesses that meet the needs of Moraga residents and enhance the town's character.
3. Strengthen Moraga's identity as a college town. (Lafayette and Orinda could use their city's prominent feature and identity as a substi-

tute for Moraga's Saint Mary's College-based designation.)
4. Modernize Moraga's two commercial districts so that they become more vibrant town centers and gathering places.
5. Promote Moraga's fiscal stability and capacity to provide essential services and infrastructure.

Comparative Data on Retail Rents in Moraga and Nearby Markets


	Moraga	Orinda	Lafayette	Walnut Creek	Danville	Concord
Avg Asking Rent/SF Q4, 2013	\$1.59	\$2.25	\$3.15	\$3.28	\$2.64	\$1.57
Avg Asking Rent/SF Q4, 2022	\$3.76	\$3.01	\$3.24	\$3.42	\$3.60	\$1.71
Avg Asking Rent/SF Q4, 2023	\$2.50	\$2.35	\$3.67	\$3.56	\$3.72	\$1.99
% change, 10 years	57.2%	4.4%	16.5%	8.5%	40.9%	26.8%
% change, 1 year	-33.5%	-21.9%	13.3%	4.1%	3.3%	16.4%

To read the full report, visit

www.moraga.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/8655/FINAL-PACKET---3-A---ECON-VITALITY-STUDY-SESSION

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Protests at Lafayette Elementary School spark controversy

... continued from Page 2

Ignoring the protests, he implied, would not result in the protesters giving up their activities. Having checked in with the school district to ask for their position, he called school district policy "faulty and fundamentally broken and ineffective." He called for "deeds and words from the council to take a stand."

Council member Susan Candell asked when the protesters are at LES. Cowger said protesters arrive approximately 30 minutes before the school children arrive, remain for several hours, leave for a short time midday, then come back after a lunch break. Candell asked if children have to walk around them on the the sidewalks or if protesters blocked traffic at road

intersections. Cowger has taken videos and has asked protesters to move aside. She noted they did comply with her requests to move, "But I'm an adult," she emphasized.

Council member Karl Anduri asked for more specificity as to times and the name of the group supporting the protesters. Cowger said during the last two weeks protesters have been in position at 8 a.m. and typically stay until the end of drop-off time. With increasing regularity, they have returned in the afternoons at 2:15 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, and 1:15 p.m. on Wednesdays when pick-up time is one hour earlier.

With public comments on the local concerns received, the matter returned to the coun-

cil. Mayor Gina Dawson spoke to Lafayette's position and said, "Of course, we welcome children, adults, whoever...everyone here. That's a statement I can say. We do strive to be inclusive and I know we do not condone the message of these demonstrations and we don't agree with them. What we can do—and I understand that vice mayor Kwok will be meeting with you Nikki (Cowger) tomorrow with some more representatives so we can hear more about your ideas. We have also worked with our police chief and I have reached out to the superintendent of the Lafayette School District to get more information."

Dawson said city manager Niroop Srivatsa would also be involved in the meetings and that allowing and responding

to the protests is "an education process and also, a protection of first amendment rights. These demonstrators are on public property. They are not allowed on the school (property) and they're being very careful of that while the children are in place. And they can actually hand things to the children, so it's one of these things where we do need to help make sure that the school district is helping to educate about what is not acceptable and help protect the kids." She said the council looks forward to following up on the speakers' ideas and appreciates their input. "We do strive to be inclusive and make sure people will feel welcome and safe. Thank you for coming out and expressing these concerns to us. It's important."



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Magical Monarchs

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The JM staff judged the initial entries, sending the top finalists for each category on to the town's Art and Public Spaces Committee for a final decision. The judging criteria was based on the poster's "creativity and ability to convey the need for locals to support monarch butterflies."

Event organizers Julie Stagg from the Moraga Garden Club, and Holly Hartz and Suzanne d'Arcy from Moraga's Art in Public Spaces Committee, held the April 16, Magical Monarch Mini Poster Gallery Showing and Artists' Reception at the Moraga Public Library,

where the 16 posters will be on display through the month of April. During that time, a sign featuring the winning posters, as well as portions of the other entries, will be on display in front of the Rancho Laguna Park's monarch garden.

Winners of the art poster, Naomi Lee (11) and Gabrielle Lee (12) — no relation — stated, "We had the option to do visual arts or poetry, and we chose art. It had to have monarchs and had to convey the value of them."

Poetry poster winner, Abbie Cunningham (12) said, "I like butterflies and art, and I wanted to participate." Cunningham was sur-

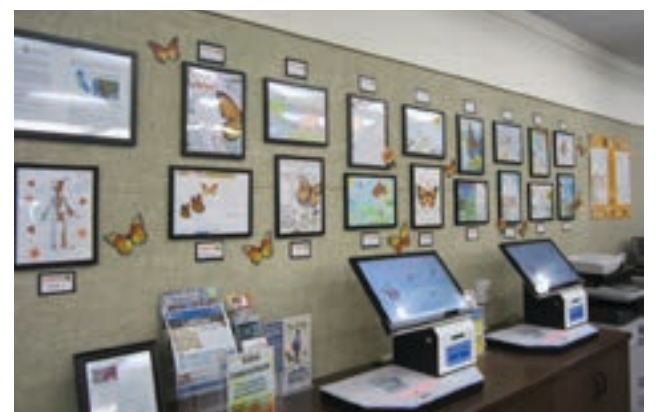


Photo Vera Kochan

Monarch Poster Contest finalists' work on display at Moraga Library

prised to have won, but admitted that no one else turned in a poetry-based poster. Nevertheless, she went the extra mile by adding artwork to her verses.

After a few speeches, one of which was given by Mayor Teresa Onoda, who said, "The future is

a canvas waiting to be painted with hope", the 16 finalists were all given monarch butterfly stickers, key chains, and Certificates of Appreciation, which were accompanied by applause from proud family members and well-wishers alike.

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Justin Pines found new ways to be himself

By Jon Kingdon



Justin and Maria

Photo provided

Justin Pines has been living a life most people would envy. Born in Lafayette, California, the Campolindo and Princeton graduate is professionally successful, a top cross-country runner, talented skier, in training for a future Olympic triathlon, and blessed with a loving, supportive family and close-knit friends. Living in Centennial, Colorado, Justin recently returned from his "bachelor weekend" in Austin, Texas, where he competed in a "Beer Mile" (drinking a beer after each lap) in anticipation of his May wedding to Maria Hidalgo in Estes Park, Colorado.

What has been most unique about 38-year-old Justin Pines' life is that for the last eight years, he's accomplished all of this from sitting in a wheelchair.

It was on April 9, 2016; Justin hit a tree while skiing in Squaw Valley, in Tahoe, California, leading to lifelong paralysis. When the ski patrols came upon Justin, he was hanging upside down in a tree well, his skis caught up at the top. His lung was punctured and had collapsed, and he had fractured his T4 and T5 vertebrae, his sternum, and six of his ribs.

Within a few days, Roy Tuscany, the founder of High Fives, was in Justin's room in Craig Hospital. The High Fives Foundation aims to be the leader of education and recovery of life-altering injuries in outdoor action sports. "Roy cruised into my room on day four, and right away, announced that 'We're here and we're going to get you back doing big things.'"

Tuscany was particularly taken with Justin's drive and commitment to doing all that he could to

further his rehabilitation. "One of our mottos is 'It'll never be the same, but it will be awesome,'" Tuscany said.

Justin approached his rehabilitation with both short and long-term perspectives. "To me, the meta point is just expanding your world back out again and having that notion of what's possible, and can certainly be a whole lot bigger than what you initially think it is, which is the size of a hospital bed," Justin said. "At that point, I couldn't even sit up, so what's possible at that point seemed pretty constrained. You don't want to go too fast, so you think about what's possible in 20 years and 50 years and how you will age and what your kids look like, and you can get overwhelmed pretty quick."

Sometimes his loss hit hard. "Riding back in the back of the bus after we did an outing to shoot archery, I was looking out the window at some of these single-track goat paths, crisscrossing up into the foothills of the Rockies that were the perfect running paths," he said. "Now that I was in a wheelchair, they were just completely off limits and I was tearing up because that was getting pretty close to my core growing up, running in the Lamorinda hills in single track. You can either just really zoom in on how much that sucks or you can go about trying to stretch the world back out again."

Justin made it clear to the therapists at Craig that he was going to set records for athletics, swimming, and pegboard, although he did keep things in perspective. "I do have a competitive ethos, but at 30 years of age, I also had a healthy

dose of self-effacing humor, not taking myself too seriously but it was definitely, "Let's see what we can get done here," Justin said. "In the pool, I came up with all 15 rings at the bottom of the pool around my arms and joked that we're keeping the records out of reach."

After ten weeks of therapy, Justin rode the handcycle just under 100 kilometers as part of the Annual Pedal for Possible, helping to raise over \$25,000 for Craig Hospital. That was just the first of his athletic accomplishments after leaving the hospital.

He beat his own record in the New York City marathon by 27 minutes, finished second for Team USA in the para-triathlon at the Pan American Games in Miami, and has also started skiing again.

Justin's friends called him to insist he not miss their annual ski trip, putting it to him with tough love: "Much to my parents chagrin, I was on the slopes pretty quick, and it's been a hard go," Justin said. "I don't really have any working core muscles to turn the sit-ski and it's been one of the hardest things I've ever done. It's been a long go but I'm skiing pretty well now."

The inner drive to succeed started early for Justin: "I was hyper-competitive to a fault in eighth grade and then with the Boy Scouts; we did a twenty-mile hike in preparation for the fifty-mile backpacking trip, and I remember I ran the twenty miles without a pack in hiking boots. After I ran that, my mom said 'It's a no brainer. You should do cross country.' So, I joined Chris Walsh's cross-country team as a freshman, but didn't train or compete all that seriously."

Despite Justin's initial lack of commitment to the team, Walsh saw something in him that Justin himself didn't. "Coach wrote me a letter which was a very shaping moment in my growing up, which ultimately led me to become a high school coach after college for a bunch of years," Justin said. "The letter invited me to the varsity altitude camp that summer, which surprised me because I was okay, but I didn't even run track. And in the top right-hand corner it said, 'Pines - some say you may be the man this year. Coach.' It was really great, Coach putting you in a vision of yourself that you never could have had on your own, never thinking that big or fully and comfortably about what your future self could be, and he put it in my head. I trained and I showed up and I ended

up being the top man on the team that year and I was the strongest one of the guys that qualified for the state meet."

Many factors have enabled Justin to deal with the disability - first off being the support from his family and friends. "My family, (parents Larry and Randi, brothers Tyler and Colby, and sister Molly), from the absolute jump, was immediately around me, from post-surgery to the whole journey since," Justin said. "There's no way that I could have made the recovery that I did physically, mentally, and spiritually, without them and my circle of close friends. These were friends that would say yes to me about taking a ski trip or traveling to Colombia and then figure out the details later. It's been a way that I've been able to live life world size, not hospital bed size."

A philosophy major in college, Justin was challenged to examine questions with no right answers. His degree provided a strong foundation in critical thinking, and problem solving.

Such critical thinking has allowed Justin to examine his situation on another level. "It's not like the answer is in the back of the book," he said. "More often than not, you're not going to put a bow on the answer and say that's done, move on. Having spent a lot of time engaging with those kinds of problems, where it's not clean and neat or black and white, that's a spinal cord injury for you. Knowing that it would look different, knowing that there was possibility."

... continued on Page 14

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THE NEXT PRO

Justin Pines



Photo provided

The Tyler family from left: Tyler, Molly, Maria, Justin, Randi, Larry, and Colby

... continued from Page 13

Justin's religious faith has been critical to his recovery. As a mem-

ber of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, he has found great strength in his belief in God. "I definitely had an incred-

ible community and a strong faith and a lot that laid a true bedrock and foundation so I knew that I would be

okay and that there were a lot of possibilities and opportunities ahead. He's been able to use my experience in a way that has been able to empower others. I'm always exploring what's around the next bend as I keep pulling the thread on what He's got in store but there's been a lot."

Having come so far, mentoring the younger disabled boys has brought Justin the most satisfaction. "They're excited to hear that I just got back from where? And you just did what? And you're also getting married?" Justin remarked. "Questions come up like: Can I wear a suit? Can I be attractive? They have no concept about going out on a date and wonder if that's still in the cards. A lot of paying back is having those conversations."

An unexpected bonus for Justin has been a new-found ability

to open up to strangers, in what he referred to as the "superpower of connection." "You establish more trust, by way of being more vulnerable, making you a better person," Justin said. "The hardest thing in my life has been my physical paralysis injury and that's on display wherever I go. I didn't know how to tactfully engage with someone in this situation preinjury, so I have space and grace for those who are curious and earnest, but I don't know every exact thing to say. I'm willing to engage with those people in these kinds of conversations."

Justin is currently employed by Cedar Health, a company that addresses issues that he had to confront after his accident. "I had a really terrible experience after my injury with the billing side of our health system and Cedar Health

builds software that makes the billing experience easier and more transparent for patients all over the biggest hospital systems in the world," Justin said.

When asked what Justin learned about himself through the experience of coping with his injuries, he replied "When the chips are really down and in an emergency situation, I was able to keep my head and I do know that about myself now. Honestly, with a lot of the experiences I had, pre and post injury, I've changed, of course, but the foundational components of elements of who I am as a person are not vastly different. I think they're just expressed in new ways and responded to a pretty sharp left turn from where my life was and where I was headed and where I am now."

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