

Opening Celebration of the Tom Preston Fitness Memorial

By Elaine Borden Chandler



Photo Elaine Borden Chandler

Andy Boggeri, Bobbie Preston, Mackenzie Brady, Renata Sos, Mayor Teresa Onoda, and Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke officially open the Tom Preston Memorial Fitness Zone on Sunday, June 23.

At noon on June 23, the opening celebration of the Tom Preston Memorial Fitness Zone at Rancho Laguna Park was slowly growing. Families stood in the summer sun examining and testing the eight pieces of exercise equipment which comprise the fitness zone. Most of the people went over to the adjacent picnic tables shaded by a ring of redwoods. Watching over the scene

from a redwood was a framed photograph of a man. He smiled brilliantly out to the crowd, wearing a black cowboy outfit complete with hat and watch chain. Somebody had taped a little caption next to his left hand proclaiming, "Motion is the lotion."

The photograph was of Tom Preston, a Moraga resident who passed away in May last year, and in whose memory

his wife Bobbie Preston has created the fitness zone. Dressed in a breezy white dress and cat eye sunglasses, she walked around the party warmly greeting visitors. She was inspired to make this fitness zone in Tom's memory because of his passion for exercise — he worked out every day in Rancho Laguna Park.

"Tom was the kindest man I've ever met.

He had an infectious smile that made everybody feel welcome and heard," said Bobbie Preston. "It was a lot of fun." To create a fitness memorial would be unexpected for most people. However, both Bobbie and Tom are renowned for their incredible generosity, from assisting Afghan refugees to helping create the Rancho Laguna Monarch Garden. "With Bobbie, there's no surprises because she has already done so many surprises," said Teresa Onoda, Moraga's mayor. "And Tom — I would always refer to Tom as Bobbie's Tom because she would make it happen and but he would do the heavy lifting."

By 12:30 the party was in full swing. Andy Boggeri, who built the Fitness Zone, acted as grill master for the day, cooking burgers and sausages. People loaded their plates and chatted with each other, pointing at and taking pictures of the adjacent fitness zone. "Folsom Prison Blues" floated through the air as more and more visitors filled up the tables.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire Department gave a presentation to the crowd on how to use an

automatic external defibrillator (AED), which is a device that can be used to deliver a shock to a heart to restore regular rhythm. The installation of the fitness zone included a new AED at the entrance of Rancho Laguna Park.

As they finished eating the food, a common topic of conversation that could be heard were memories of Tom and Bobbie. "As they finished eating the food, a common topic of conversation that could be heard was memories of Tom and Bobbie. Julie Stagg, who co-founded "Moraga for Monarchs" with Preston, spoke of how monarch butterflies are seen as returning souls in certain Mexican cultures. "When Tom first passed, it was really hard on Bobbie and all of us. And we hadn't had a monarch at the Monarch Garden in a while. Jessica [Fleming], Bobbie, and I were down at the garden and we were saying, 'Come on, Tom!' And all of a sudden, this monarch was there like, Here I am!"

At 1:30 p.m., everyone moved over to the entrance to the Fitness Zone and stood in a semicircle as Bobbie Preston gave a speech. "Tom died doing what he loved

to do. He was at a three-week fitness camp in Utah. When he was admitted to the ER, he was listed as John Doe, 60. He was 81 — and he would have loved that," she said to chuckles from the crowd. She then thanked everyone who had helped with both the party and the creation of the fitness zone. Mayor Teresa Onoda, with help from Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke and last year's mayor Renata Sos, wielded a pair of huge scissors to cut the red ribbon and officially accept the park on behalf of Moraga. Next, Boggeri spoke on how incredible Bobbie Preston was and reminded the crowd to donate to the fitness zone. Preston took the microphone one last time and urged the crowd to become familiar with how to use an AED. "I felt really strongly that an AED be included in this project," she said into the echoing microphone. "If there had been an AED at the pool where Tom passed out in the water, he would be alive today." She then thanked the crowd, who applauded and dispersed into the park.

The new Oakland Ballers

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The team is recompensed for the players and the team is giving a portion of that money to a community group.

The attendance has

been good, but the Ballers are still trying to unlock more audiences, including from Contra Costa. "My friend Josh Lateiner brought his family and he said how it only took 20 minutes to

get to the game and he was able to park right across the street. We're trying to get the message out that going to a Ballers game is accessible, affordable, safe, and a fun thing to do as a family."

So, what has Carmel learned so far? "We live in a time where our social institutions are really dissolving in a way that scares me for the future of children, and it can be disillusioning. However,

this adventure has renewed my faith in the fact that people want to connect with each other; they want to be part of something that's bigger than themselves and they want to participate in

things that don't have to do with their self-interest. At a time when self-interest seems like it's the religion of the United States, it's nice to see that people still want to be part of something bigger."

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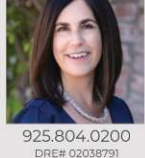
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