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MORAGA PARKS & RECREATION

Familiar face moves to MOFD

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Julie Sparks hired as new MOFD Office Specialist for Emergency Preparedness.

Julie Sparks, long known in Lamorinda as the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Registrar and trainer and a Fire Adapted Community Ambassador (FAC-A), has been hired by the Moraga Orinda Fire District. Sparks, who started her new job on Monday, now serves as an Office Specialist in Emergency Preparedness. She will be working closely with Dennis

Rein, the MOFD Emergency Preparedness Coordinator.

Sparks has also been a member of the MOFD Communications Support Team and is a member of the Lamorinda Area Radio Interest Group (LARIG) and holds a HAM radio license. An Orinda resident for 17 years, she is the mother of two adult sons who went through the Orinda school district.

She will be required to give up some of her previous activities, which would constitute a possibly perceived conflict of interest now that she is officially a MOFD employee, including her role as Secretary/Treasurer of the CERT Foundation, a position she has held since 2013.

Sparks plans to reach out to significant players outside our area and observe what has

been working for them and how those practices might fit in our area. She will meet regularly with and support all the community volunteer groups who have a stake in emergency preparedness, include CERT, the MOFD Communications Support Team, LARIG, and FAC-As, as well as multiple Firewise neighborhoods.

"My goal is to continue the great work in emergency preparedness that has been started by MOFD, and further develop our community connections through education, transparent and accurate information, face-to-face brainstorming, and strategizing to build Moraga and Orinda's preparedness for disaster and foster resilience in our towns," Sparks has said. Although Lafayette is not part of MOFD, Sparks plans to liaise with the neigh-

boring community.

When not at work, Sparks enjoys hiking with the Lamorinda mom's hiking group, spending time with her boyfriend Craig (sometimes on the back of his Harley Davidson motorcycle), and caring for her senior rescue canine 'house hippo' Vera. Sparks is always learning more from her tech friends in the radio club over coffee at Café Teatro on Tuesday mornings, and often is the net control for the General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) monthly net that allows radio users to maintain their radio skills.

"I am beyond grateful to have this opportunity to work with such a great group of firefighters at MOFD," Sparks says. "I look forward to being on the team that works diligently to keep our amazing community safe."

STRIVE PATH

College Coach's Corner

WITH Sunny Grewal

Welcome to Coach's Corner, where we address questions asked by local student families. If you have a question for us, please email us at contact@mystrivepath.com.

Question: My son is about to start at Acalanes. I keep hearing about "intellectual curiosity" and how it's important when it comes to college admissions. What is it, and how should we think about it in the context of choosing courses and extracurriculars?

Answer: Great question!

Intellectual curiosity (IC) is a key factor in college admissions, especially at selective schools that carefully review applications. It's more than just taking challenging courses—IC reflects a student's genuine interest in learning and exploring subjects that truly captivate them.

Colleges use various criteria to evaluate applicants, and while intellectual curiosity is a bit nebulous, it's highly valued, particularly by smaller, selective institutions. Schools like Emory even score applicants on their IC, helping admissions committees decide whether to admit a student. In contrast, larger public schools may place less emphasis on IC, focusing more on grades and test scores.

So, how can your son demonstrate intellectual curiosity? It's about making thoughtful choices in course selection, essays, recommendations, and extracurriculars. Encouraging your son to pursue subjects that genuinely interest him—whether it's Japanese, Art History, or even chess—can help him stand out. The key is to take these courses and activities because he's truly curious, not just to impress colleges. Authenticity in his interests will resonate with admissions committees.

Ultimately, the best way to approach IC is to prioritize genuine learning over college admissions. If your son pursues what he loves, his intellectual curiosity will naturally shine through. And if certain courses or activities, like weightlifting, are right for him, it's important to support those choices, too.

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Ballot security

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Voters have questioned whether a convicted felon is allowed to vote. CCC states, "Under California law, you are eligible to vote if you are a U.S. citizen, 18 years of age or older on election day, not currently serving a prison term for the conviction of a felony, and not currently found to be mentally incompetent by a court. A person with a criminal history cannot vote if they are currently serving a state or federal prison term for the conviction of a felony." Once released from prison, under California law, their right to vote is automatically restored and they should register.

CCC assures the public that voting by mail is a highly regulated process and "fraud is nearly impossible due to the number of checkpoints, people, and systems that work to-

gether" to keep the vote safe. The drop boxes are made of high-grade metal, are bolted to the ground, and equipped with tamper evident seals, locks, and water/fire proof materials. Also, there are multiple procedures in place to detect if someone has voted more than once thanks to the activity being logged in the voting history system. Cases where a voter has attempted multiple votes are reported to the District Attorney and the Secretary of State Fraud Division for investigation and possible prosecution.

When it comes to counting votes, scanners can't always "read" the vote if there are stray marks, more ovals filled than allowed, or write-in votes. In these cases, the ballot is sent to adjudication where a team of two election officials examines the ballot and makes a joint decision

on the voter's intent. Ballots that are damaged (ripped, torn, or stained) can't be put through the scanners and will be duplicated onto a readable ballot by two election officials that will then reprocess it through a scanner.

In a recent press release by CCC Clerk-Recorder-Elections Office, voters should be aware of a "potential texting scam asking about voter registration." California voters have been receiving texts asking them to check their registration information through provided links. If anyone receives this type of text message, do not click on the links. Instead, go directly to www.contracostavote.gov and click onto "My Voter Registration" to verify status.

Contra Costa Registrar of Voters Kristen B. Connelly stated, "Remember that your County Elections Office

is your trusted source of election information. We are urging our residents to be vigilant and to reach out directly to the County Elections Office if you have any questions about text messages or emails that ask you to register to vote via a link that is not directed to our website."

Misinformation and Disinformation: Election Edition. Join a presentation from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m. at the Lafayette Library on Thursday, Aug. 22 for an eye-opening discussion of the impact of misinformation and disinformation on elections. Learn how to spot fake news, fact-check sources and navigate the complexities of today's media landscape to become a more informed voter and citizen. The presentation by the League of Women Voters of Diablo Valley will take place in the Homework Center, 3491 Mt Diablo Blvd, Lafayette. Register at https://ccclib.bibliocommons.com/events/666b5c05d8f18e57580c645a7blm_aid=32036. Contact programs@lwdv.org for more information.

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