

## Letters to the editor ... continued

### Firewise and Code Enforcement are Not Enough

Making people aware of, and responsible for, firesafe vegetation management on their properties is commendable. Setting code and inspecting to enforce it puts some teeth behind what we should all be doing.

But it is not enough.

The SF Chronicle reported "At 2,220 total, the 94563 ZIP code covering Orinda had the most non-renewals of any ZIP code in the state." What do the insurers know that we don't? That despite current efforts by Orinda, MOFD and MOFN (Moraga Orinda Firewise Network), Orinda has unacceptable wildfire risk levels.

To check this out, wildfire prevention expert Dr. John Radke and a wildfire fuel mitigation contractor tested three "firesheds" in Orinda to see how well they were doing. The contractor walked the properties and estimated the work needed to bring them into a

"fire safe" condition.

One of the three, around Tiger Tail Ct in North Orinda, was shown to require almost \$200,000 of work to make it as "fire safe" as possible. About 1/3 of the properties in this particular fireshed have been "certified" code-compliant by MOFD and the vast majority of the properties belong to a Firewise Neighborhood. All three firesheds together required \$346,000 of work. Extrapolating to all 100 firesheds in Orinda results in \$11.5 million of work needed to make Orinda firesafe, bring insurers back to Orinda, and minimize the need for emergency evacuations, another evolving news item. Details at [www.saferorinda.info/wildfire-prevention-in-orinda-example](http://www.saferorinda.info/wildfire-prevention-in-orinda-example).

What we are doing is not working. In 2022 Radke made a proposal to Orinda to model the fire risk throughout Orinda, fireshed-by-fireshed, to direct mitigation efforts. This modeling, based on satellite data with ground

verification and enhancement, would be updated periodically to flag where improvements needed to be made (just like we do with the roads). The proposal was endorsed by the SSTOC, tasked with coming up with a wildfire prevention plan, but their endorsement was overridden by City Manager David Biggs who claimed the proposal, utilizing prediction models in use since 2006, "pure research".

It is time for Orinda and MOFD to examine a "Plan B".  
Steve Cohn  
Orinda

### Paul Chopra - Best Choice for AUHSD School Board

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for Paul Chopra in the upcoming Acalanes High School District (AUHSD) school board election. In our community, where the quality of education is of utmost importance, Paul stands out as a candidate who not only

brings valuable financial expertise but also demonstrates a genuine commitment to the well-being and academic success of our students.

With 25 years of experience as a CPA and a track record as Treasurer and Board Member for Lafayette Partners in Education, Paul has also contributed to a Lafayette School District Committee that identified over \$2 million in savings and revenue opportunities. This experience is crucial for our school board, where prudent financial oversight and strategic resource allocation are essential to maximizing the impact of our educational programs. With Paul's financial acumen, we can be confident that our schools will benefit from efficient budgeting and thoughtful investment in key areas of innovative curriculum, technology, and teacher development.  
Sincerely,  
Sue Severson  
Orinda

## Lafayette's Pacific Chamber Orchestra welcomes world-class pianist

By Emma Wong



Photo courtesy Lawrence Kohl

The Pacific Chamber Orchestra, with Music Director Maestro Lawrence Kohl at center.

On Saturday, Sept. 14, in the gorgeous Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, will be the musical collaboration of a lifetime: world-renowned French pianist Denis Pascal and the Pacific Chamber Orchestra (PCO).

This organization is led by founder and Music Director Maestro Lawrence Kohl, who previously served as President of the Lamorinda Arts Council (LAC). Sue Farmer, current president of the LAC, is also a PCO board member.

"My friends and I started PCO back in 1989 in San Leandro. We are dedicated to sustaining classical music's rich heritage and bringing the community together," Kohl said.

In addition to performing, the PCO also brings its "Discover Music" program to elementary schools, introduc-

ing classical music to the next generation. For middle and high-school orchestras and bands, the PCO frequently provides instructional clinics.

Defined as "one of the finest French artists of his generation," piano virtuoso Denis Pascal has performed everywhere from his native Parisian venues to international festivals.

Educated at the prestigious Paris Conservatory, Pascal traveled overseas after his college experience to study at Indiana University in Bloomington. He has since toured the world and formed a musical group, the Trio Pascal, with his two sons. His repertoire runs the gamut of musical periods and composers, from Romantic-era icons like Franz Liszt to Impressionist figures including Erik Satie.

Now, Pascal will be traveling to

Lafayette — for the second time. 12 years ago, Pascal and the PCO held a prior performance. "I met Denis through his wife Marie-Paule Milone, who is an incredible singer and cellist," Kohl said. "The entire family are all superstar musicians."

Pascal will perform Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, a near-20 minute Impressionist score composed in 1931. The piece kicks off with an unusual instrument, the whip — its crack begins a quick allegretto movement. The concerto features numerous instruments, from oboe to piccolo to percussion. Composed as Ravel's final "farewell" score, the piece is a flowing three-piece movement and is influenced by jazz. Ravel was inspired by American music after spending a summer in the U.S. in 1928.

Directly following Pascal's performance will be the PCO's rendition of Johannes Brahms' Symphony No. 3 in F Major. Brahms, a German composer, published Symphony No. 3 in 1883, a half-century earlier than Ravel's Concerto. The composition involves a full range of instruments, including strings, winds, brass, and timpani for a sum of 43 musicians. A secret message hides in the first three notes of the piece — F-A-B — which many say translates to Brahms' personal saying, frei aber froh, which is German for "free but happy."

Kohl anticipates a powerful, genre-blending performance. "What is most exciting to me is to pair these magical works together," Kohl said. "It will be eye-opening to explore the dazzling colors of the Ravel with Denis

and unearth the internal emotive, motivic, and rhythmic glue that unifies the breathtaking Brahms' Third Symphony."

The performance is being supported by the Lafayette Community Foundation and individual donors. Next on the PCO's calendar will be the "Dream American" concert in Livermore on Oct. 27 and a performance of Handel's Messiah in Lafayette on Nov. 31.

Kohl hopes for the performance to uplift the human spirit. "There is nothing like the binding communal experience of an orchestra concert," Kohl said. "The experience in the concert hall is a sacred testament to the best of what it is to be human."

The LAC's president and PCO board member, Sue Farmer, encourages young musicians to attend. "The arts are such an important part of our culture, but they need our support," Farmer said. "Producing a live concert with a full orchestra is expensive, but it is a thrilling experience for the audience. More people should be able to enjoy live concerts, especially the youth."

"When one supports the musical arts, they give not only to the organization but to everyone whose lives are touched by those who attend the concert," Kohl said. "The world is made a bit better with each live performance."

Doors open at 7 p.m., with the two-hour concert beginning at 7:30 p.m. Adult tickets are \$55-75. Student tickets are only \$25. For tickets and information, visit [pacificchamberorchestra.org/tickets/](http://pacificchamberorchestra.org/tickets/).

## Meet 101-year-old John Hill

By Mitch Reichenbach



Photo Ann Murphy

John Hill at his residence

In our ever-hectic lives, it is easy to overlook Lamorinda's rich history. Many of us unwittingly pass by historical buildings and landmarks each day, without a second thought, unaware of the legacies each one holds and how it has shaped our beautiful community.

From the remnants of the Moraga Railroad stop to the historic Moraga Adobe, and even to Acalanes High School, built as part of FDR's New Deal project, history surrounds us every day in Lamorinda. Meeting John Hill is like stepping back in time; his presence and story serve as a poignant reminder of the rich history embedded in our community.

At 101 years old, John Hill is a captivating and astute gentleman who generously shared excerpts of his life story with me. As I walked into his home, I caught a glimpse into Mr. Hill's life. The flags of over twenty countries filled one wall. The room was adorned with images from his life, showcasing his wedding, travels, friends, and family. Countless books, ranging from history to Charles Dickens, were scattered around his room and on shelves. Throughout the next hour I spent with Mr. Hill, I learned about pivotal moments of his life.

Mr. Hill grew up in the Bay Area with his parents and two brothers, George and James. His father, George Hill Senior, completed only a third-grade education and worked as a truck driver for a local coffee shop. Mr. Hill attended Polytechnic High School followed by San Francisco Junior College.

He was 17 years old when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. He recalls the exact moment when he learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and described sitting in the car with his friends as the radio broadcast projected Roosevelt's voice. "Yesterday, Dec. 7, 1941, the empire of Japan..." John recited Roosevelt's words when announcing the bombing. He said Roosevelt was an amazing speaker and he can still hear his voice in his head today. When recounting the discussion with his family at the time he said, "We thought we would probably end the war in six months."

Following the US entering the war in 1941, John completed his Associates Arts Degree at San Francisco Junior College before he enlisted in June 1942. Mr. Hill enlisted in the Navy before being drafted due to his strong patriotism. He expressed little hesitation for himself, his brothers, and his peers when it came to serving for the United States in the war. Mr. Hill became a medic in the Navy and was deployed to New Guinea and Sydney, Australia. Following the war, John was accepted at Stanford University through the GI Bill and graduated in 1949 at the top of his class with a Cum Laude Degree. At Stanford, John stud-

ied history and wrote his thesis: Russian as Seen by American Magazines, 1917 - 1920. He also got his teaching degree, which he would use following his graduation.

Apart from Mr. Hill's professional life, he shared with me some memories of his personal life. John met his wife, Margery, in a church program and married her just a few years later. Although neither of them are French, Mr. Hill married his wife at the French Church of San Francisco as a romantic gesture. He spoke to me about their travels each summer, over which they visited more than twenty countries together. His favorite of these countries is Ireland.

After getting married, Mr. and Mrs. Hill lived in Oakland. Wanting to find a larger home for their children, Mr. and Mrs. Hill went looking for a new house nearby, exploring areas around Walnut Creek and Danville. It wasn't until Mr. Hill saw a newspaper image of Moraga that he decided to move there. He described the image as being all blank except for Saint Mary's College. Due to his love for Saint Mary's College and its sports, Mr. and Mrs. Hill moved to the newly developing Moraga in 1954. He has been living in Moraga ever since.

## Seasonal trends

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The first feature-length documentary on Lempicka, Rubio's film captures the essence of the artist's journey, highlighting her creative genius and her struggles as a woman in a male-dominated world.

The film includes never-before-seen 8mm home movies, interviews with Lempicka's great-granddaughter Marisa de Lempicka, and actress Eden

Espinosa. Additionally, Rubio's film will have its world premiere at the 2024 Mill Valley Film Festival on Friday, Oct. 11 at 7 p.m., with a repeat screening Oct. 13 at 2 p.m. For tickets visit: [www.mvff.com/early-bird](http://www.mvff.com/early-bird). "Tamara is truly getting the recognition she deserves," says Rubio, "and we are honored to be part of this historic moment, contributing to her enduring legacy." Don't miss a chance to see Lempicka's work as well as Rubio's

film (two powerhouse women) at the de Young Museum, Oct. 12 to Feb. 9, 2025.

Finally, BART is getting fashionable with an upcoming runway show titled Project Doneway: A Farewell to BART Paper Tickets. Students from four local Bay Area universities have been invited to design clothing from paper BART tickets, and they will show their creations at the Rockridge Station in Oakland on Saturday, Sept. 14 from

1 to 3 p.m. For more information visit: [www.bart.gov/news/articles/2024/news20240828](http://www.bart.gov/news/articles/2024/news20240828).

Embrace the trends and go forth in style.

Moya Stone is a fashion writer and blogger at [www.overdressedforlife.com](http://www.overdressedforlife.com).