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 24 Orinda Way www.christianscienceorinda.org
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Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church, 433 Moraga Way Orinda

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 9:15 a.m. Coffee Fellowship
 9:40 a.m. Education for all ages
 10:45 a.m. Celebrations Worship Service
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 283-3722 • www.oslc.net

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 Classic Worship, 8:15 am
 Education Hour, 9:30-10:20 am
 Contemporary Worship, 10:30 am

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682 Michael Lane, Lafayette, 284-7420, www.stanselms.ws

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 Saturday Night Catalyst (Young Adults) @ 7:30pm

LAMORINDA Community

Moraga's New Chief of Police Faces Local Challenges with Confidence

By Sophie Braccini



After he is sworn in, Chief of Police Priebe (right) poses with Tracy, his wife of 31 years, and his son Ron, a police officer in Pleasant Hill
 Photo Officer Randy Pacheco

Robert (Bob) Priebe was sworn in as Moraga's Chief of Police at the April 22 Town Council meeting. After 29 years serving our Town, and despite the challenges the Department faces, the young-looking Chief feels blessed to be able to continue to serve.

If it hadn't been for his wife, Tracy, Priebe says he would never have left his previous job with the Berkeley Police to come to Moraga. She said that when he was working in Berkeley, every time the phone rang she was afraid something bad had happened.

"But I had a great time in Berkeley," remembers Priebe, "Telegraph Avenue was my beat,

there was so much to do, team work was excellent, and the Department was run very professionally."

Leaving Berkeley for Moraga has not lowered the level of challenge. "Moraga is a relatively safe community, but not always for its Police Department" says Priebe. "There is crime here like anywhere else and officers have to face tough situations often on their own. In Berkeley, the department was so large that getting reinforcement was fast and easy, you never had to face a dangerous situation alone. Here, even with a radio system linking us to Lafayette and Orinda, getting help can take a while." At night, there are only two officers on duty,

if one has to leave to take someone to Martinez (County jail) the officer who is left has to handle everything by himself.

More than one Moraga officer has been lost to retirement after injuries suffered dealing with individuals resisting arrest. "One of the growing problems we are encountering here are people with mental health issues," states Priebe. "We had 32 people committed to psychiatric evaluation in 2008 and 10 cases this year so far." Priebe believes that the reduction of funding for the mental health system has required families to care for sick parents at home and as a result the number of incidents is growing.

'Budget cuts' is a popular tune in Moraga as well. When Chief Ruppenthal left, the department had only eight officers available, including Priebe. "I had to ask the team to fill so many overtime periods," said the Chief, "I never heard a complaint. They are dedicated to Moraga and worked out together the extra shifts." Now two officers who were on a long leave of absence (but paid by the Moraga Police) have been retired and Priebe was able to recruit new officers. The Department now comprises eleven individuals, with the possibility to recruit two more.

"When we hire new officers we disclose everything," says Priebe, they know they will have to take initiative, that they won't be able to count on their days off, and that sometimes there won't be any Sergeant on duty. They have to be able to make decisions on their own."

The problem with retaining Officers who become efficient and independent here is that other agencies are looking to hire them, and that resulted in the loss of two officers last year. "One of my duties is to create a work environment so people will want to stay," says Priebe. He adds that his second duty is to prepare the Department for his retirement. Priebe projects working another five years in Moraga; he wants to have a succession plan in place even if, as he says, the day-to-day putting out fires activities don't leave a lot of time for planning.

Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writers and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly.

All published letters will include the writer's name and town (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only), and should be 350 words or less. Letters may be edited for length or legal considerations.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: **Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570**

A New Chief of Police for Moraga

JM auditorium was packed. There were three important items on the Moraga Town Council agenda. The first item, however, brought the largest crowd of friends, family, fellow officers, Moraga town staff and representatives. All had come to witness the swearing in of Robert Priebe as Moraga Chief of Police. Bob has been with the Moraga Police department for 29 years. Chief Priebe thanked many people, with a special thank you to his wife Tracy for always supporting him. This special evening was also Bob and Tracy's 31st wedding anniversary. He gave Tracy a beautiful bouquet of a dozen yellow roses to mark the day they said "I do." Their son Ron was there to help his Mom pin Bob's chief's badge on his uniform. Ron is 29 years old and was 11 days old the day Chief Priebe joined the Moraga Police Department. Ron is a canine officer with the Pleasant Hill police department. Bob and Tracy have two other children, who

live out of the area.

His comments about a former Moraga Chief of Police, Brad Kerns, were especially poignant. Brad was Chief in 2004. Chief Priebe said, "Chief Kerns was the most important mentor of my life. He opened up a new way of being for me. I used to be very adversarial. Brad taught me that I could be a successful police officer by being kind and respectful. I could still be tough and straight, but being kind would get me much further with the people with whom I lived and worked. This was a turning point in my life."

Moraga is lucky to have Chief Priebe at the helm of the Moraga Police Department. Welcome, and may you serve Moraga for many years to come.

Edy Schwartz
 President, Moraga Chamber of Commerce

Public Forum JOIN IT

Save Environmental Education in Orinda

Budget issues in the Orinda Union School District have been the source of great controversy and have triggered parent outrage in the city of Orinda. Earlier this year, the school board published a list of programs that may be cut in the 2009-2010 academic year. The naturalist position at Wagner Ranch Nature Area was at the top of the list. This position is the backbone of the environmental education program, which is a unique, hands-on, standard-based outdoor classroom for all of the elementary school students in the district. As an Orinda parent, I would like to comment on this issue and to explain more fully what I see happening in this community.

While it is true that many parents in the community are angry and frustrated, they did not approach the school board from an adversarial position. In recent school board meetings (both in March and April), community members pleaded with the school board to work with them in a collaborative way to look at options for saving the nature area and the environmental education program. Three specific proposals for alternative funding for the program were presented to the school board. In addition, several requests were made by members of the SEE committee (Save Environmental Education) for a task force to explore other options. However, this seems to have fallen on deaf ears. So far, there has been no response from the school board to any of these requests. It is difficult to understand this silence. It certainly makes me, as a parent in this community, question whether the school board sees itself as accountable to its constituency.

I am struck by the lack of transparency in the board's decision-making and what appears to be a lack of interest in parent input. The board talks about problems with the budget that would make the cut to the en-

vironmentalist position necessary. However the budget is posted nowhere. At the recent board meeting, they mentioned that surveys of the community were used to prioritize programs and to place the environmental education on the top of the list of potential cuts. However, as far as I can tell, the last survey conducted by the district was in 2006 and it was never published. We don't know how many parents completed that survey or how representative it is of the parents' views. I am told that the district no longer surveys parents, but as far as I can tell no alternative was put into place to hear parents' perspectives - there is no parent teacher organization within the OUSD through which to bring concerns. The school board meetings are held at 4PM on weekdays, which is difficult for working parents to attend. As a parent, one begins to wonder if the school board really wants to hear your voice. As a parent who gives money each year to the District to supplement state funding (and to fund programs such environmental education) I find their stance insulting. It is as if they want my money but don't want me to be a partner in the decision-making about how my money is used.

What started as a desire to preserve environmental education at the Wagner Ranch nature area has become something much larger. Nearly 600 community residents recently signed a petition to save the environmental education position. This is certainly not a small group of disgruntled parents but a large number of citizens who do not agree with the board's stance on this issue. Until the school board responds to the community and engages in a dialogue about budget decisions, this firestorm will only grow stronger.

Sincerely,
 Susan Bell
 Susan Bell is a concerned parent of an Orinda 5th grader, a signer of the SEE petition, and a psychologist at UC Berkeley.