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Residents Trying to Quiet Orinda

By Andrea A. Firth



Susan and Peter Kendall, organizers of Quiet Orinda.
Photo A. Firth

concerned residents. From there the Kendalls established Quiet Orinda, a forum with about 70 members so far, to educate the citizens of Orinda about healthier alternatives to leaf blowers and to promote legislation to encourage these alternatives.

"It's really a two-part problem. Noise and particulates, or what I refer to as the invisible stuff," states Peter. Although the noise had prompted the Kendalls' disdain for leaf blowers, they have become increasingly concerned about the organic matter and detritus made airborne by the machines. "Leaf blowers emit a jet stream of air at a velocity of greater than 200 miles per hour," states Peter adding that there has been quite a bit of research conducted on the hazards of particulate matter.

The City of Orinda's current noise ordinance allows power equipment for yard maintenance to be used on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Gas-powered leaf blowers are prohibited on Sundays. The Kendalls and other Quiet Orinda supporters claim that leaf blower noise builds to a shrieking crescendo as the week progresses toward Saturday, because many people like to have their landscaping crews come toward the end of the week to get the yard ready for the weekend.

"It is a real source of aggravation for me," states Orinda resident Jeff Segall, the father of two-year old twin girls. "We have to retreat to the indoors when the neighbors' gardeners arrive," he adds noting that his children have been awakened from daytime naps by the leaf-blower noise. Segall, who became involved in Quiet Orinda after reading the Kendalls' letter to the editor, has also been impressed by the reported negative health effects associated with particulate matter.

Maya McBride moved to Orinda about seven years ago and has three boys ages two, seven, and ten years of age. "I was surprised by how noisy Orinda was when we moved here," states McBride, who has also signed on in support of the Quiet Orinda cause. Four of the five properties adjacent to her home use the same landscaping service on the same day, Saturday, she explains. "Enjoying my backyard is a problem. We just can't use the yard on Saturday," she says.

Quiet Orinda's most recent project has been the development of a four-minute documentary about the impact of leaf blowers on the semi-rural hamlet of Orinda. The film short includes interviews with several residents and will be screened at the upcoming California Independent Film Festival to be held at the Orinda Theater in April. "We wanted to highlight the impact that these ubiquitous machines have on Orinda," states Peter who with Susan hopes to garner further support for his movement to rid the city of leaf blowers.

Switching to brooms and rakes is the simple solution to avoiding the noise and air pollution caused by leaf blowers, according to the Kendalls. While they employ these quieter, less technically sophisticated gardening tools to manage their own yard, the Kendalls recognize that changing the gardening habits of local landscapers may take more than a polite request. Peter Kendall's research into leaf blowers revealed that over 100 cities in California, including the east bay cities of Berkeley and Piedmont, have ordinances that restrict leaf blower use, and the Kendalls would like to see Orinda added to the list.

More information about Quiet Orinda can be found at the organization's website

www.quietorinda.com.

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