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Virtually Neighbors

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According to this Nextdoor map, 40 percent of the Rheem Valley Manor households in Moraga have registered on the site.

Gene Gottfried was their area captain for many years and has recently retired from the role, she said. Since then Heilmann, along with Jennifer Matthews and Jake Acevedo have shared the leadership role.

Orinda's Patti Young joined Nextdoor in August of 2012. She calls the site "an excellent way to communicate quickly with my neighbors in case of an emergency or simply to gain or give out information."

Young said she is "heavily involved" with the Community Emergency Response Team, the Orinda Citizen Corps Council, K6ORI radio group and Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Communication Support 245 team. "I know that these four organizations highly recommend that Lamorinda citizens use Nextdoor as one of their means to organize their neighborhoods for better communication prior to an emergency," Young said.

In contrast, Duncan Seibert, program manager for Lamorinda's Community Emergency Response Team, may be the lone naysayer in the crowd. "I may well be wrong but I have not had good luck with it except for baby sitters and garage sales," he said. But Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda governments think otherwise; each has incorporated Nextdoor as a city-wide communications tool.

A Moraga police department press release explained via email that "town departments plan to share important news and updates, available services, programs, public events, and emergency notifications that are relevant to specific neighborhoods," and respond directly to Nextdoor member questions and comments. (See related story on page A9.)

"Of course there are privacy guidelines, and one can put out as much or as little information as he or she would like and a person can choose to only see listings from his or her own neighborhood or multiple areas," Young explained. "The developers of Nextdoor are genuine in wanting us to be happy with their application and frequently ask how they can make it better to fit our needs," she said. "Go check it out and encourage your neighbors to do so as well."



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