



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors

Wednesday, Jan. 21, 7 p.m.
Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information

ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107, Administration Building, 651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas, visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

Emergency response information and training:
Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
www.lamorindacert.org.

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One District, Indivisible

Wyro Retires from the MOFD Board

By Nick Marnell



Retired MOFD Director John Wyro
Photo provided

The refrain “But that’s the way we’ve always done it” has been the undoing of many a manager or company. As John Wyro relates, that phrase sparked the for-

mation of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, from which he retired in December after nearly 17 years of service as district director.

A few months after Wyro’s appointment as a director of the old Orinda Fire District, the fire chief walked into his office. “He handed me a copy of a budget and said that we needed to approve it that night,” said Wyro. “I told him that I can’t do that, and he said that was the way it’s always been done. Needless to say, it didn’t happen.

“As we dug into it,” continued Wyro, “the more we realized that Orinda was subsidizing (the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District). We had old equipment, and most of all, no paramedics, and terrible response times. More often than not, (American Medical Response) had an ambulance in Walnut Creek responding to our emergencies. We started talking with Moraga and we decided we should become our own district. We put a group together and formed MOFD in 1997. Day one, we had paramedics staffing engines,” which Wyro credited to the efforts of interim chief Mel Deardorf.

“John always believed that since the new Moraga-Orinda Fire District was now serving a larger constituency, it was truly one dis-

trict serving all residents equally,” said Gordon Nathan, one of the original district directors.

MOFD made national headlines in 2009 when it was revealed that upon retirement fire chief Pete Nowicki spiked his pension to an amount significantly higher than his final salary. “It was my biggest mistake and disappointment,” said Wyro, speaking of the board’s approval of that retirement package. “My lack of feeling the need to go into the kind of depth necessary to investigate that situation, well ... it was a question I didn’t ask and should have.” The district has eliminated the spiking program in the fire chiefs’ contracts.

Wyro left no doubt as to his top accomplishment. “It was bringing paramedics to Orinda,” he said. “I know as a result of our efforts doing that, lives have been saved. There are people walking around today who wouldn’t be if we hadn’t done that.”

Many think of Wyro’s leadership in the fire station 46 joint venture between MOFD and ConFire. “I would like to have finished it, but I’ll be at the hearings,” he said. “I understand the process. I know the players in Lafayette, so I think I can help make it happen as a volunteer citizen. At a minimum, I’ll

be at every board meeting where that’s a topic, and I’ll be at the podium.”

He would not validate the complaints of a grass roots committee that claims north Orinda response times will be increased if station 43 is razed and replaced by station 46. “The district represents a larger constituency than just the folks around station 43. When all is said and done and they see the facts, their arguments are going to wither,” he said, again emphasizing the district as a single entity.

“It’s good to have board turnover,” said Wyro. “It was time for me to go, time to get a different look at things.” Though, he did say that he was prepared to file papers to run again, and that he would have served another term to finish up station 46 if no candidate surfaced whom he was happy with. “But, I am very comfortable with Brad (Barber) and I think he is going to be a very good director,” he said.

MOFD director Fred Weil served 11 years on the board with Wyro. “It was always a pleasure to work with John, in part because he would speak directly to issues with no hidden motives or agendas,” he said. “His focus has always been on the welfare of the whole district and its residents.”

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Got an Issue? There’s an App for That

Residents yearning to report issues like barking dogs, signal outages, abandoned vehicles, overgrown trees, unsafe sidewalks or even potholes can alert city staff with a few simple clicks of a smartphone. Late last year the tech-savvy City of Lafayette announced the launch of a Code Enforcement application for smartphones. The mobile app, called GOREquest can be downloaded on Apple and Android devices and al-

lows users to include specific details of an issue. “It allows users to take a picture, select an issue type, add comments and include a location of the complaint,” said Code Enforcement Officer Adam Foster. “Information is then instantaneously forwarded to the appropriate staff member.” For those without a smartphone, there is an online Code Enforcement Request form, or simply call the code enforcement officer at (925) 299-3207. *C. Tyson*



From Front Page

The Man Who Plants Trees

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Beware the person who doubts this, following him into the bush. Silva has a mission. And that mission is to put back the redwood trees that were all sawed down and hauled out just about 100 years ago, in the early 1900s and before, planting them back into the bramble and thimble that has become an establishment of his hacked down, replanted watershed. The Monterey pines are gradually getting taken out. As EBMUD ranger and naturalist Matt Sporleder said, “Someone in the 1950s thought that was a good idea” to plant those Monterey pines. Think again, he says.

“Those trees are dying and they only have about a 50-year lifespan,” Sporleder said of the pines. “Mark Silva has a vision for that area.” To that end, Silva has taken it upon himself, for the past 20 years, to collect endemic seeds, germinate them in his back yard in Castro Valley, nurture the seedlings at the EBMUD yard in Orinda, then transplant the trees back into the watershed. He even goes out in the spring to the creeks and nets the pools of fallen redwood seeds that have blown down, dries them, then plants them scatter-style in his nursery to see what sprouts.

“I really don’t know what I’m doing,” he says modestly. But then again – it’s at least 400 trees later. For instance, on a recent hike through the watershed, a woman leading a Welsh

pony called out to Silva: “Are you checking on your trees?” Silva muffled a yep. “They’re doing good!” she yelled.

“I’ve watched him,” said pony owner Karen Bottiani of Lafayette, contacted later by phone. “He’s a really good guy. What he is doing is going to completely change that landscape. It’s going to put it back where it used to be. This place is going to look completely different in 50 years.” More like it used to look, she said. She has seen him in dry seasons carrying 5-gallon jugs of water to redwood seedlings that need that first jolt for the first couple of years. “If they get water in that first year, that’s what counts,” Bottiani said. “He’s making sure those trees get that.”

Silva’s goal is simple: Replace the non-native Monterey pine with the more fire resistant native coast redwood. He not only wants to protect obstruction of the public road by falling pines, but to protect the watershed from unnecessary runoff into the actual water by having sustainable trees that don’t fall down in a big wind storm. To that end, in 2003 Silva found what he calls the “glory hole,” something a public relations savvy reporter told him was a bad name for a hole. Silva did not know what she meant. Instead, he espoused on how he had found a hundred, no hundreds, of saplings in an area that he pillaged

for seedlings and, while leaving plenty, dispersed them throughout the watershed.

“Here’s one!” shouted Silva, diving into a pile of poison oak. “I didn’t know this one made it.” He subsequently began to tear down the broom overshadowing the pre-pubescent tree, shining light on its pale green branches. “Here you go!” Silva said, but he swears he doesn’t talk to the trees.

“I’m not kidding,” said Sporleder, who is taking out a Girl Scout troop later this month to plant 20 more redwood trees from Silva’s nursery. “He goes out when it’s raining hard and just stands there. He wants to know where the water is going. He wants to see where the erosion is happening. He looks and sees what needs to be done to keep the water clean and the soil in place.”

“Then he plants trees,” Sporleder said.

On a recent day at the Valle Vista lot, several acorn woodpeckers flew in to take their spots on remaining Monterey pine snags. What about them?

“Oh! We kept those snags there just for that reason,” Silva said. “The woodpeckers like them.” He calmly looked down at his wrist, and it wasn’t even 10 a.m. “Hey! I got 10,000 steps!” (On his Fitbit device.) “Now let’s go see some trees.”