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The foundation's foundation

By Cathy Dausman



Ellen Long Photo Cathy Dausman

Ellen Long has devoted a lifetime to serving her family and community. She's been a preschool teacher and teacher's aide, but she devoted heart and soul - and 34 years of her life - to Rescue One Foundation.

Rescue One Foundation (established 1977) is a nonprofit philanthropic organization supporting the Moraga-Orinda Fire District through its purchases of advanced lifesaving equipment and supplies not otherwise available through the district's regular budget. Past foundation donations include automated external defibrillators for fire, police and community, CPR training equipment and a Lucas chest compression system, a Stryker power load ambulance cot and an unmanned aerial vehicle for search and rescue.

Long admits she is "embarrassed about the fuss" her stepping down has caused; she reluctantly agreed to an interview only after realizing it might focus attention anew on Rescue One.

Rescue One President Gordon Nathan calls Long "quiet and unassuming," but her service years as vice president, secretary, treasurer and current historian tell a different story. Nathan first met Long when his children attended Mulberry Tree Nursery School, where Long taught. "She is a tireless worker and selfless person who loves her community," he said.

Long counters she is simply one of 11 board members whose numbers include businessmen and women, a doctor and a judge. Although its members may hold different opinions, Long says the group can always reach a consensus.

Long's story may sound familiar to many Lamorindans. She was raised in San Francisco, attended UC Berkeley, met her husband when he was in law school and started a family. After nine years in Castro Valley the family moved to Moraga. The town was "not booming yet" when the Longs bought their home in 1969. Long joined the Moraga Service League in 1970 and learned about the half hour ambulance wait a member's badly injured husband endured. This precipitated fundraising \$10,000 for a rescue vehicle destined for what was then the Moraga Fire Protection District. Long recalls volunteers, herself included, from many service organizations going door to door to solicit one dollar.

MOFD retired Division Chief Darrell Lee was a young firefighter/paramedic during the 1980s when he met the iconic "Miss Ellie," Lee says

Long baked apple pies for all three station shifts. "I don't remember how long she did this, but it was at least 15 years," he said. "She made me one of her pies when I was a captain at Station 41. I assisted their family off-duty and she asked how she could return the favor. I asked, 'How about the famous baked apple pie?' She didn't hesitate," he said. "She was like a mom to the crews always asking about their families," Lee added. When it came time for business and Lee was requesting equipment, "Ellen would usually look me in the eye and ask if this was something we really needed."

With a "yes" from Lee, Long promised "you have my vote." Long's favorite foundation event has always been the semiannual foundation-sponsored MOFD Open House held in Moraga in the spring and Orinda in the fall, and the abundance of and enthusiasm of children attendees. "They're so excited, and so willing to get involved," she said.

Long says she feels bad about retiring, but insists the foundation needs "some young blood." Asked to create a job description for her replacement, Long lists someone who is enthusiastic, interested in the fire service, willing to commit to a worthwhile cause, has computer literacy and is able to attend evening meetings.

"When Ellen joined the Rescue One board in 1985, we knew we had another community loving, active member," Nathan said. "The entire board is sad to see her leave, but we all offer our best wishes for a well-deserved retirement."

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