

As Gas Prices Change, So Do Some Lamorinda Residents' Daily Lives

By Jennifer Wake



For some Lamorinda residents, the recent spike in gas prices has not made much of a difference in their lives. They still cue up in the drive-thru lane at local fast food restaurants, car motors burning fuel as they wait to place their orders. For others, the spike is not only putting a dent in their pocket books, but is making them rethink how they accomplish daily tasks or even how they make a living.

One Lafayette mom has changed how she drives around town. Determined to cut down on fuel consumption, Joanne Tan maps out errands and child drop-offs so that she is making less stops.

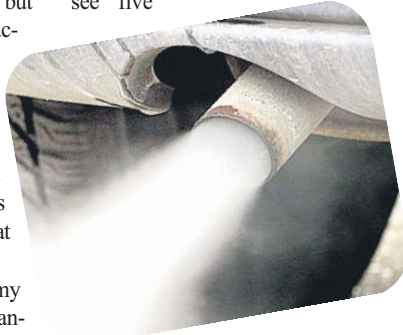
"I combine chores and plan my driving route in the most efficient manner so that one trip will take care of multiple chores: dropping off my son for a piano lesson off of Mt. Diablo Blvd, then going to Trader Joes, then on the way back, dropping by Bank of the West, then picking up my boy," Tan says. "Planning ahead saves me gas and time."

Conrad Basset, who is the owner/managing partner of Outsource Relocation Partners in Moraga, is on the road a lot for business and has made a similar shift in how he schedules time on the road.

"A lot of my business is the marketing of homes owned by relocation companies, so I need to make property inspections of the vacant homes at least a couple of times a week to make sure that they are secure, that maintenance is being taken care of, etc.," he says. "Instead of visiting one property one day and another the next, I now make a lap of all of the properties to avoid driving out to Oakley and back to Moraga and then over to Dublin, for example."

Basset has also noticed a marked increase in carpooling in his industry.

"Real estate agents used to go out on their own or with another agent to look at the homes on Tuesdays," Basset says. "Now when a car drives up to a broker open house we often see five



people get out to tour the listing; we are also seeing fewer agents from other areas coming over to Lamorinda on tour. They are staying closer to their offices."

One Orinda mom, who asked not to be named, uses her husband's car on the weekends, since gas is paid for by his company. But she is not over-doing it.

"Now I call first before going to Target to see if they have what I need, and I will walk to the grocery store," she says. "Gas prices have totally affected us. There were times when a friend and I would be going somewhere, and I'd quickly say 'I'll drive!' Now, we really talk about it."

Lafayette resident Marti Kohen has her kids ride their razors, skateboards, or bikes to the local pool for swim practice and for work as life-guards. "There are definitely more carpools and more organized errand running," she says. Another Moraga

mother, who owns an SUV, asked for a bike rack for her birthday and now drives her kids one way. They bike themselves home.

Since November 2007, Americans have been driving less, according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – good news for reducing greenhouse gas emissions; bad news for the Highway Trust Fund, which relies on revenues from the federal gasoline excise tax, it says.

Other bad news may come in the form of a reduction in volunteer drivers who help organizations like Meals on Wheels or Seniors Around Town (SAT) – a program exclusively for Orinda seniors who are no longer able to drive and who may not qualify for the County Connection LINK system.

Fortunately, Orinda Association president Kate Wiley says the generosity of her volunteer SAT drivers hasn't changed. The organization, however, has changed the type of award given to their Volunteer Driver of the Year. "In the past the volunteer might have received flowers," she says, "but now thanks to donations from our community, as a gift to that person we give them gas cards."

Others are seeing more of their neighbors working from home. Basset says he has seen some "marginally producing" agents leave the business altogether "due to lack of revenue and the cost of doing business (i.e. cost of gas)."

Joanne Tan, however, sees a silver lining to the high gas prices. Tan believes this is a wake-up call to expand the use of public transportation (which she reminds us will benefit our planet's health), and hopes we can gradually reducing the use of low occupancy vehicles.

cles.

Until then, look for more hybrids on Lamorinda roads. At least two more joined the ranks this past year: Basset's Honda Civic Hybrid and the Tan's Prius.

Gas Saving Tips

Last year, when a gallon of gas cost a measly \$2.75, Joanne Tan, who is the leader for the Holy Planet Task Force and who won a Lafayette Green Award, was already promoting gas-saving tips. These tips were originally intended for reducing CO2 emission and saving the planet from global warming, but now help Tan and her family reduce fuel consumption as well.

- Instead of using AC, roll down all vehicle windows by two inches to allow fresh air to circulate. (Rolling windows all the way down creates drag that makes the vehicle burn more fuel.)

- Combine chores.
- Purchase a hybrid car.
- Other small steps: check tire pressure regularly, avoid driving with heavy loads in the vehicle, avoid idling more than a minute, and drive at a moderate speed without frequent change of speed or breaking, when possible.

(source: "Live Green To Do List", Joanne Tan, Holy Planet Task Force)