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Moraga-gate?

By *Andy Scheck, Sophie Braccini and Lee Borrowman*

After being contacted by a concerned Moraga resident who had received an anonymous political email from a person or persons who refused to divulge their identities, calling themselves by the apparent misnomer, "Moragans for Government Integrity" (MGI), the Lamorinda Weekly was surprised to discover that MGI had used our Post Office Box number as their mailing address. The Lamorinda Weekly is not affiliated in any way with MGI, nor would we be involved with one-sided political action, particularly an action that contained racial innuendo -- this was cause for further investigation.

A check of MGI's website registration (www.moragansforgovtintegrity.com) appeared to reveal a flurry of recent activity. Prior to the use of the Lamorinda Weekly's address, the site's administrative contact had been listed under the last name Clement, with a Burbank address. A day later, the name of the site's administrative contact was changed to Mark Felt, phone number 925-123-4567, and our address (Mark Felt, as many may recall, is the name of the former Associate Director of the FBI who revealed three years ago that he was the source known as "Deep Throat" in the Watergate scandal.)

Publisher Andy Scheck contacted the legal department of the site host and filed a report with the Moraga Police Department.

The regulations of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers require the administrative contact for a web site to have a legal address. Clement could not be reached for comment. The Moraga Police Department is still investigating.

Clement's name also formerly appeared on the website registration of Moraga Town Council candidate Howard Harpham, although that too was changed on the same day as MGI's and Harpham is now listed as the contact for his own website, www.howardharpham.com.

When we approached Harpham with our documentation at a recent Town Council meeting, wondering if there was a connection, Harpham replied, "I guess it looks like it," but declined to comment further.

The anonymous email in question suggested that a link exists between current Council member Ken Chew, Council candidate Karen Mendonca and Walnut Creek printer Cedric Cheng.

One of the claims was that Chew had pressured Town staff to award a printing contract to Cheng without going through the proper bidding process. Philip Vince, who was the Town Manager at that time, said he was aware that allegations had been made and did not wish to comment. The business between Cheng and the Town was for an amount below that which would have required the Town to follow a competitive bidding process. "I looked at the offer, asked my clerk to compare a few unit cost prices and made the decision," recalls Vince.

Another element of the email was an inference that Chew and Cheng were conspiring to nail down the Asian vote for Mendonca. Both Cheng and Chew are members of the Chinese American Political Association (CAPA). The anonymous email claimed that CAPA urges Moraga's Asian voters (15% of the population) to "block vote" for the candidate they choose.

Some members of Moraga's Asian community felt offended by the comment. Eugene Tomine, a Moraga resident of Japanese origin who had seen the email, found it distasteful. "I do not see why the '15% Asian Americans' living in Moraga

had to be brought into this," he said. The soft-spoken attorney added that he didn't appreciate the racist tone of the text.

"I had never experienced racism toward Asians in Moraga before this email," said Susan Jun Fish, a Korean-American mother who has lived in Moraga for six years, "I recognized the racist tone of this negative campaign material and hope that other people will recognize it as well and just erase it." Jun Fish continued, "We have worked for decades to reduce racism; that email sent us back to the 60's. Racism doesn't belong in Moraga or anywhere else, it breeds paranoia and fear against other cultures when we need to foster integration of the many different traditions that make our country."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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