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LAMORINDA Community

MOFD Chief Nowicki Retires and Returns

By Andrea A. Firth

After more than 23 years with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Fire Chief Pete Nowicki retired from his position as MOFD's top fireman at the end of January. He had served as the District's Fire Chief for the past two and half years. At the January 29th meeting of the MOFD Board of Directors, Nowicki was immediately rehired as Acting Fire Chief when the Board voted unanimously (4 to 0) to employ him on a contractual basis at a salary of \$14,700 a month through June of 2009.

Orinda resident Clyde Vaughn questioned the Board's decision to retain Nowicki as Acting Chief and pay both his pension and new contract salary and asked if the Board had considered promoting one of the Battalion Chiefs as an alternative. Board President Pete Wilson responded that Nowicki had been rehired at a reduced salary that would save the District about

\$70,000 on an annualized basis. Wilson stated that no formal succession plan for the Fire Chief post has been established, however he indicated that plans for a search for Nowicki's replacement were getting underway.

At this same meeting, the MOFD Board appointed Directors Fred Weil and John Wyro to participate as the Fire Board representatives on a three-party committee that will evaluate the recommendations of Orinda's Revenue Enhancement Tax Force regarding property tax allocation. Back in November, the Task Force identified the MOFD's share of the property tax distribution as a potential source of revenue to be tapped to help fund Orinda's infrastructure needs. In addition to Weil and Wyro, the committee will include Orinda Council Members Steve Glazer and Victoria Smith and Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter and Council Member Mike Metcalf.

MOFD's Borden Gets \$1,500 Grant

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District recently received a \$1,500 fire prevention grant from FM Global for the purchase of equipment to assist with fire investigations. Battalion Chief Ed Borden was awarded the grant based on his application. Borden attended an arson investigation class at the National Fire Academy last Fall and was part of a group activity that investigated a scripted fire scene. A professional-grade digital camera to assist investigating fires had been on Borden's wish list for a while, and the benefit of having a camera for fire investigation was further emphasized by his participation in the arson investigation class. The camera will assist the MOFD to determine the cause of fires and to investigate fires more efficiently.



Lafayette Business Person of the Year Tom Courtright (left), owner of Orchard Nursery, with Mayor Don Tatzin, at a dinner reception held in his honor last Friday. Photo John Sherry

Neighbors Win - Divisive Permit Denied

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There were additional concerns by other Council Members about opposing claims around easements, obtaining clear title and removing trees. Council Member Brandt Andersson, alluding to the low sales price, \$20,000, "suggests it is unbuildable."

Attorney for the applicant David Bowie asserted that "there is no rational reason to impose additional restrictions." Land

owner Dick Holt stated, "I am convinced I have a legal right to develop this property."

Angry neighbors clearly disagreed and felt considering Holt's former position on the Planning Commission, that he was getting special privileges. Adjacent uphill neighbor Lakshman Watawala read from the deed to his property, "This is very clear: 'From the top of the road all the way to the bottom, a non-

exclusive easement over, under, around and through lot 66.' If this is not clear, I don't know what is." He added that all of his Sessions Road neighbors have similar language on their deeds.

Former Mayor, long time resident and retired real estate attorney Ned Robinson urged the Council, "You should recognize this easement. The people uphill could not have built with out this easement."

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From left: Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin congratulating Oliver Rotundo, Christine Mlynek and Annika Sonne along with their parents, friends and neighbors (not pictured) who diligently worked to raise over \$32,000 as a matching contribution for the Stanley-Springbrook Traffic Calming Project. For more information go to www.acalanesvalley.com Photo provided

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Upsurge in Fake Solicitors in Moraga?

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"First a young couple came to my door," said a Moraga resident who would rather not be identified, "they were very clean cut and told me they were living down the street." The two asked the resident money to support the UC Berkeley Music Department. When she asked to see their permit they said they just lived down the street with their parents and gave her a name she didn't recognize; when she said so, they became defensive and left.

Two days later the same resident was solicited by another young man who said he was raising money for Campolindo High School. "I told

him that I needed a proof that was true, and he answered that his father was a local doctor who had promised to match any donation he raised," said the resident, "and he gestured up the street." The two asked the resident money to support the UC Berkeley Music Department. When she asked to see their permit they said they just lived down the street with their parents and gave her a name she didn't recognize; when she said so, they became defensive and left.

"People who canvass for money have to register with the Police Department," says Interim Chief of Police Robert Priebe, "after checking their credential and their organization, we issue a letter that they have to present along with their identification, when they peddle." The letter is on Town of Moraga Police letterhead, is dated and signed by the Chief; it identifies the organization and the area where the group plans to market. Patrols get a copy of the letter so they know which

groups are legitimate. "We issue these letters just a few times a year," says Deedie Warner, the Assistant to the Chief of Police, "and we never get complaints about these groups."

When the Police are called about suspicious solicitors they investigate and if the solicitors are not holding permits they are asked to leave. "We have seen very well organized groups that come from out of State, they stay at a local hotel and go door to door, often selling magazine subscriptions," explains Priebe. He adds that his department has never issued a citation for illegal solicitation. "Selling magazine subscriptions and lying about who will benefit from it is unethical, but it's not illegal as long as you receive your magazines," adds Priebe, concluding, "Don't give anybody cash and if you have questions, call us."

Greater Bay Area Franchise Chain Stores Recently Investigated by the State of California for Repair Fraud.



It turns out that many automotive repair facilities were recently accused by the Bureau of Automotive Repair following numerous motorist complaints. Over 100 alleged violations were filed, including the selling of unneeded services, making misleading statements, and false advertising. This includes many cases in which frustrated consumers received brake repairs at prices that were grossly inflated over the advertised "Brake Special" prices.

Many motorists are enticed by the low-cost advertised by these types of businesses. In reality, as alleged by these complaints, the motorist almost never gets the repairs at the advertised price. The fact is that these types of

shops can make no profit if work is done as advertised. These same types of shops work with quotas and commissions, that lead to trouble for consumers. Unfortunately, this is a recipe for greed to come in to play and the consumer pays the price. These practices are hurting motorists as well as the hardworking and honest repair shops. Consumers should not settle for unethical business practices. There are plenty of independent, family owned, automotive repair businesses in the Bay Area that are honest, well trained and reliable. However, they will not be found by shopping for the cheapest "Brake Special" price at some franchised chain store.

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SMC Spring Creative Writing Reading Series Kicks Off

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Intimately familiar with Antarctica having spent several months there as a journalist tracking the efforts of Greenpeace, Roberts also lived and worked in New Zealand where she embraced the adventurous spirit of the Antarctic explorers who came from and passed through its shores. Roberts brings her passion for the South Pole to her to her writing and expands upon the stories of a number of the men who were members of Ernest Shackleton's legendary Antarctic expedition. "Antarctica was transformational for me," says Roberts. "It's a horrible, beautiful place. It was place that I didn't want to leave."

The Creative Writing Reading Series will kick off with Los Angeles native and short fiction writer Dana Johnson on February 18th. The Series will also include

award-winning poet and well-known editor of The Nation, Peter Gizzi; fiction and nonfiction writer Lee Montgomery, who authored *The Things Between Us: A Memoir*; and poet Kazim Ali, who teaches creative writing at both Oberlin College and the University of Southern Maine. The season will conclude with readings from Mary Volmer, who received an M.F.A. in Creative from the SMC in 2005 and published her first novel, *Crown of Dust*, in 2006, and faculty member Lysley Tenorio, who was awarded the prestigious Whiting Writers' Award in 2008 for his fiction writing.

Details of the SMC Creative Writing Reading Series can be found at <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/schools/school-of-liberal-arts/departments-programs/mfa-creative-writing/reading-series.html>.