

The Lamorinda Weekly—Looking Back and Forward

By Andrea A. Firth



March 14 - 16, 2007: 25,000 copies of issue #1 were thrown on driveways by about 25 people

March 14th marked the three-year anniversary of the launch of the *Lamorinda Weekly*, and this is the 81st issue. By many measures, this biweekly newspaper, which serves our three-borough community, has been a successful venture.

Our first issue was 16 pages long and had 35 articles, 5 staff writers, three photographers and 50 ads. Our last issue, at 32 pages, had 53 articles, 13 staff and contributing writers, five photographers, three columnists, 11 submissions from the community (now that's what we call a success story), and 150 ads. Our internet use has grown by 313% over the last 12 months; we now have about 1,000 visitors a day with 2,500 daily page views.

Given the economic downturn and the collapse of many mainstream media outlets, to experience business growth in this environment, especially with a print newspaper (which we also publish online), might be considered remarkable. While we are feeling pretty good about the viability of our little community paper, we ask ourselves why it works and what more we can do to ensure it continues on this path.

Recently Richard Hernandez, an award winning photojournalist

and Fellow with the UC Berkeley School of Journalism, came to the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church to give a presentation about the future of print journalism. Could he predict what lies ahead or help us on our journey? Hernandez left the San Jose Mercury News after a 20-year stint, because he felt that the innovation at the paper had stalled. Hernandez's presentation came without a crystal ball. He admitted, "I don't know what lies ahead for print journalism."

However, Hernandez remained cautiously hopeful, "There is a lot of hype around the 'print is dead' story," he stated. And as the crisis in the newspaper industry has unfolded, he has seen a move toward the smaller, monthly and bi-monthly community papers.

"In 2006 I started a company for database design and marketing services," states the *Lamorinda Weekly's* publisher Andy Scheck. "At the time, local businesses did not have many opportunities to connect with the community. I heard many people discuss Lamorinda's need for a good local newspaper."

From the outset, the *Lamorinda Weekly's* model has differed from the traditional newsroom cluttered with a sea of desks, computers, and phones and buzzing with the din

of a large staff. Ours is a virtual newsroom. The sales, marketing, production, and management for the newspaper are conducted from Andy and Wendy Scheck's home office—two desks in the family room that looks out to the backyard. Andy's son, Jonas, helps with the layout of the paper from his home in Germany, and Wendy's daughter, Amanda, contributes graphics working from the laptop in her bedroom. Other than a weekly editorial meeting of six core staff held around the Schecks' dining room table, all of the paper's business is carried out in the virtual world. The writers, photographers, and editors have their own spaces and communicate over the web and by phone. Some of us have never met face to face.

"All of our work is done using digital technology," explains Andy. "Email is our main form of communication." Wendy elaborates, "The virtual nature of the paper is one of the main reasons it works so well. We are able to live two or three lives at one time by reporting, writing, photographing, editing or selling while doing other things. I think everyone who is involved with the paper is fairly altruistic by nature and they also hold themselves to very high standards. We share a sense of pride and accomplishment within the team that is really very satisfying on a personal level."

One of the key elements essential to creating a newspaper that brings value to the reader is providing content that is important to the reader, Hernandez explained: "The future depends on the needs of the community, the involvement of the community, and the voice of the community."

"Almost all of our staff and contributors live or work in Lamorinda. Our writers are reporting on events that take place within the scope of their daily lives. They have connections that naturally bring them close to stories that other people in the community also care about," says Wendy. "To make it all work, we have an editor who demands that they keep a neutral voice and sets a high bar for editorial integrity. Even though they might write about things close to their hearts, they also reach outside their own experience and put a lot of time and effort into researching, interviewing and listening in meetings," explains Wendy.

"We select team members based on their involvement within the community," Andy adds. "And because we live here, we listen to our readers daily. I hope I will not insult our advertising customers, but in fact, our most important customers are our readers."

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The hope for print journalism lies in our ability to be innovative and responsive to the community, according to Hernandez. Andy believes, "Innovation comes from our readership. We're open to sugges-

tions and our 'newsroom' is more all over Lamorinda than in our office." Wendy adds, "I think that our readers value the paper because it helps people feel connected and gives them a real sense of community."

Meet the Publishers—Andy and Wendy Scheck



Photo Doug Kohen

When Andy and Wendy Scheck left the high-tech industry in 2005, they wanted to start a local business, so they looked around for a niche that needed filling. Andy recalls having a conversation with a friend who suggested a newspaper and the concept clicked. "I knew enough about desktop publishing, database publishing, web and graphic design to get started," says Scheck who set to work on a business plan the next day. A critical component of his original model was the framework for community participation in the paper.

"During the last week of December in 2006, Andy

produced a prototype with our first printer and we met with representatives from each of Lamorinda's communities to get feedback," says Wendy. "The response was very positive. I used the prototype to sell ads, and we published our first issue a few weeks later." The Schecks originally planned on a weekly publication, but moved to a biweekly format after the first month. "That change saved the paper," notes Wendy.

The Schecks believe that community involvement is fundamental to what makes the newspaper thrive. They are active members of all three Chambers of Commerce in Lamorinda, and offer discounted advertising rates to charitable organizations. Andy, a Rotarian, recently launched our Community Service section after a conversation with a local community organization, offering a space for submissions from those involved in service projects. For the Schecks, the community's voice is paramount. They make every effort to publish all letters to the editor and article submissions that they receive (which meet the paper's guidelines).

Although not exactly a democracy, the paper is horizontally structured—among the senior staff, everyone gives input and has a voice. Both Andy and Wendy are very good listeners. In addition to his role as publisher, Andy developed the proprietary database for the paper's website that archives all of the content online, and he lays out the paper himself. Every other weekend, the couple rarely leaves their Moraga home. Andy works day and night to prepare the week's issue with Wendy's help; Wendy also handles advertising sales and marketing operations for the paper.

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Three Lamorinda Women Honored

By Sophie Braccini



(L to R) Ellen Beans (Moraga), Carrie Dern (Orinda), Assemblymember Nancy Skinner, Anne Grodin (Lafayette) Photo Sophie Braccini

Ellen Beans, Carrie Dern and Anne Grodin brought their unique shades to the tapestry of different women who were recognized by Assemblymember Nancy Skinner for the 2010 14th Assembly District's Annual Women of the Year award. Although they expressed surprise at being selected, these women from Moraga, Orinda and Lafayette, respectively, represent our communities at their best; displaying the spirit of volunteerism, selflessness and community service.

"Traditionally, the Assemblymember recognizes one woman every year," said Nancy Skinner during her address at the celebration luncheon in Berkeley on March 6th, "but how could I honor only one woman? There are so many unsung women heroes in our communities that I wanted to celebrate one woman in each of the entities of my

district." District 14 encompasses Lamorinda along with ten other cities including Oakland, Berkeley, Pleasant Hill, and Richmond.

"Nancy Skinner's office contacted local non-profits and community leaders, and asked for outstanding volunteers," said Jill Ellis, Executive Director of the Center for Early Intervention on Deafness, who nominated Orinda resident Carrie Dern. It took months for Skinner's staff to contact hundreds of community members to solicit nominations and choose 14 recipients among the 120 nominations received. "When I received the call, I knew I had to nominate Carrie (Dern)," added Ellis, "she has been an exceptional volunteer for our group, always performing beyond expectation and giving back to communities far and near, looking to help beyond her own needs."

"I am one of several people who nominated Anne (Grodin)," said Lafayette Council Member Don Tatzin, "and I am delighted that she was chosen." Both Tatzin and City Manager Steve Falk came to the luncheon to support the woman who was so instrumental in raising funds for the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Moraga Vice-Mayor Karen Mendonca was among those who nominated Ellen Beans. "Ellen Beans' coordination of the Moraga Citizen's Network is an example of community service at its finest," said Mendonca, "she is committed to providing factual and objective information to town residents so that they, in turn, can more effectively participate in local discussions and deliberations."

Honorees from other east bay cities came from all avenues of life, reflecting the diversity of our region. For example, Susie Medak, the Managing Director of the Berkeley Repertory Theater, was recognized for her educational outreach. Eileen Hadidian of Albany was acknowledged for founding the Healing Muses, an organization that uses music to create a peaceful sound environment to support patients in hospitals. Rosa Acosta, the Executive Director of 'Morada de Mujeres del Milenio', an association that provides support for bicultural women affected by domestic violence, was also recognized.

"Assemblymember Nancy Skinner has created a memorable way to honor women of the district," commented Grodin. "It is wonderful to participate in such an inspiring event," added Beans. "it consolidates my belief that we can bring about positive change."

Ask Dr. Harold

Positive Psychology

By Dr. Harold Hoyle, Ph.D.

My column in January on mindfulness received a record amount of positive feedback. Simply put, people enjoyed hearing about positive psychological practice. One person I talked to at a Saint Mary's game (congrats for winning the tourney by the way) asked me if there were more things she could do to keep herself psychologically healthy.

There is an entire field of study in psychology now called positive psychology. In my practice I often find people dealing with the question, "What is wrong with me?" Positive psychology is more interested in answering the question, "What is right with me?"

So, in real life what does positive psychology look like?

Positive psychology is the study of what is going on in our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors when we are at our best. What is happening when we create something? What is happening when we find meaning in something? What aspects of our psychic world are impacted when we feel connected to another human being? How can friendship or a walk on the beach with our shoes off make us feel better?

It is the study of what goes right in life from the beginning to the end. Think about how often have considered what was going on in your life when you did your very best work or had your best relationships. Psychologists have traditionally worked with people and the

disorder in their lives. Psychologists who work in this do not ignore or dismiss the low times, but they do believe that the connected and creative times in our lives deserve as much research focus as the low times.

A psychologist who uses the techniques of positive psychology will have you focus on your strengths. If you have had a yearly review or been to a team building training you have been exposed to the positive psychology principals. You might be thinking, "Ok Dr. Harold, you want me to just think positive thoughts and my life will get better? Really! Really?"

Yeah I know, so here are three researched-based techniques for you to look at for this year:

- 1) Review your experience and locate those times when you were the most creative, had the most passion, felt the most intelligent and identify the values you had that were associated with those experiences. This is often the first step in an executive coaching plan at work or a life plan in your personal life.
- 2) Create a plan that seeks to increase the possibility that those types of experiences will happen more often. If you loved to sing in college then take a look into joining a group or choir or volunteer to teach choir at an elementary school that doesn't have a music program. An artist I am working with recently told me I should write poetry; so I did. The poetry was horrible, but it changed the way I

looked at the world a bit. It brought me a perspective that I hadn't visited since my college creative writing class. And you know what? It was kinda fun.

3) Get some support. I work with a very successful client who, at age 15, decided he needed a Board of Directors for his life. (I personally was deciding between Coke and Pepsi at 15.) Having a mentor is a lost art in our society. Get a mentor or get together with friends more often. Human connection is vital and often a place where we can find meaning or clarity about our lives.



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