



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published March 30st, 2010

Letters to the Editor

Editor:

As the weather improves, more and more people can be found enjoying our wonderful Lafayette-Moraga trail. I would like to address those who ride bicycles on the trail. And I would first stress that the vast majority of you are careful and polite. But I met a rider recently (March 14) who was neither.

I was walking on the right edge of the trail when another walker with a dog began to pass me. Just as he pulled up next to me, a young man on a bicycle tried to pass between the two of us, hitting me on the elbow and shoulder. Extreme road rage could only describe his behavior, as he began screaming at us for hogging the road and not giving him the right of way. He also asserted that the posted speed limit -- "posted everywhere," he shouted -- was 15 mph, thus he had every right to be going as fast as he was, so fast that he could control neither his speed nor direction. Thankfully I was only bruised as any doctor bills would be mine, since he would not give his name or provide an id. He just stormed off in his fury, never bothering to ask if he had injured anyone. He was dressed in complete cycling gear, so I will conclude that he was not a casual rider, but someone who rides regularly and should know better than to behave so recklessly.

So bicyclists, please remember that there are people of all ages on the trail from toddlers with their parents to older folks. Also remember that not all of us will hear you coming up on us from behind; calling out a warning is much appreciated. Most of us do not mean to be "hogging the trail" and will gladly give you the room you need to pass. You are going the fastest of anyone on the trail. You have the power to cause someone injury. A little courtesy and common sense will go a long way.

Sincerely,
Joyce Simkins
Moraga

Leaf Blowers

Editor:

There has been some recent agitation and letters to the editor proposing the banning of leaf blowers in Orinda. If leaf blowers are banned, the current cost of hiring a gardener will double or, if you do the work yourself, your time will double. Replacing leaf blowers by raking leaves is a very expensive proposal.

Orinda already has the times and days regulated when leaf blowers can be used. These regulations are adequate. If a neighbor's gardener violates these regulations, there is a simple remedy: Go to the neighbor and give him or her a list of the days and times allowed for leaf blowing and tell him or her that their gardener is violating these regulations and if he continues to do so he will be fined. If the violations continue, get the gardener's name and address from the neighbor, report to the Orinda Police Department and follow up on the police. This will cure your problem. If you don't have the courage to do the above the problem is you, not the leaf blower. You can get a list of leaf blower days and hours by calling the Orinda Police Department.

There is a small minority of Orindans who think everybody in Orinda is rich. They aren't, and they don't have money to waste satisfying the whims of this minority.

Clyde Vaughn
Orinda

Editor:

With regard to the ban the leaf-blower movement, some of us do actually live in a semi-rural environment, which means we are living at the urban-wild lands interface. To the west of our subdivision are thousands of acres of undeveloped open land, stretching all of the way to the Oakland hills. Semi-rural for us means half acre plus lots with the ever present risk of fire sweeping into our subdivision from the western wild lands. MOFD requires us to abate dangerous vegetation. To do this I use all the mechanical devices suitable to the task, such as leaf blower, weed whacker, chain saw, and chipper, all of which are noisy and produce a fair amount of dust. Since we are in the falling ember zone of the adjoining wild lands, it is very important to keep our roofs cleans of organic debris. About 80% of my weed blower use is in keeping my roof cleaned. Others in our subdivision use leaf blowers for the same purpose. Doing this by hand is tedious, time consuming and more dangerous than using a blower. Using a blower is a simple ten minute walk around my roof and gutters. Putting a large impediment in front of this process means people simply won't do it, with possible disastrous results. Think here of the Law of Unintended Consequences, which might be phrased as Ban Leaf Blowers – Burn Southwestern Orinda to the Ground. Clearly an EIR would be needed here before putting the ban in place. Peer reviewed studies using scientifically accepted protocols should be obtained

that show the relative harm caused by leaf blowers is greater than that caused by the permitted uses of weed whackers, chain saws and chippers and how this compares to the harm caused by an Oakland hills type of fire. I have no desire to make the history books by being part of a neighborhood that disappears into ashes. Exclude or exempt us from this meddlesome and dangerous ban.

Ronald L. Clendenen
Orinda

Dear Editor:

Why stop at leaf blowers? Let's eliminate all noise in Orinda!

This would mean no chain saws, weed whackers, and tree trimming. It would also forbid motorcycles, construction power tools, BART noise (because sometimes I hear it and it bothers me) police and fire sirens....and how about car and house alarms, garbage trucks, and barking dogs, not to speak of kids playing outside, outdoor parties, and airplanes (Orinda should be a no-fly zone).

Perhaps we should make Orinda as quiet as Colma!

No question that there should be time limits (start/stop requirements) on leaf blowers, tree trimming, weed whacking, etc...but let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater!

John M. Cahill
Orinda

Measure A

Dear Editor:

It is a sad state of affairs when I am told that my incoming high school student might not be able to take some of the classes that are standard to a ninth grade education. And even sadder that the counselor who relayed this bad news doesn't know if she'll have a job next fall. My daughter graduated from Campolindo High in 2007, and is now excelling in the honors program at UCLA. This is in large part due to the excellent preparation that she received by taking AP courses at Campolindo, courses that may not be available to my son unless Measure A is passed.

California's education system is definitely in disrepair and the frustration we parents feel is overwhelming, as is a feeling of helplessness. It is simply not enough anymore to donate to our PTA's and LASF. While we certainly need to continue with our personal donations, our schools need something more, and right now, that something more is Measure A. A vote for Measure A is a proactive way to ensure that our high school system receives much needed revenue to save jobs and save classes. Please vote yes on Measure A.

Sincerely,

Nancy Schoenbrunner
Moraga

Editor:

"Draconian" doesn't begin to describe the budget cuts forced on our local schools by the state's dysfunctional finances. State cuts over the last few years have taken more than 27% of our schools' financing. Schools now receive fewer dollars per student than they did in 2005. Imagine the effect if your income was cut by 27%.

We can't do much locally to fix the state's deep-seated financial problems. What we can do is try to minimize the impact on our schools, students, and property values. Even deeper cuts in state funding for next year have forced the Acalanes school district to ask voters for a temporary property tax increase, which will help avoid severe cuts to every part of the curriculum. Science, math, language and social studies class options will be reduced, and many electives will be cut. Student support services such as librarians and counselors will be cut even further than the current low levels.

Local tax opponents have been writing in with their usual opposition. It's sad that they don't seem to understand the value of education to our society. We are educating future doctors, scientists, and problem-solvers. I can't imagine a better use of my money than to give students a better start in life. Aren't we supposed to leave the world better than we found it?

Our high schools already have some of the best results in the state, with some of the lowest funding. They do not waste money on frills. Student test scores are high, and our students have an admirable record of going on to four-year colleges. The state cuts threaten to make this a thing of the past, as more than 50 teachers would be cut, along with the classes they teach. Measure A, a May 4 mail-in ballot measure, will cost only 31 cents a day. It will expire after five years. It's a pittance, to stave off a true disaster for our high schools. Please join me in voting Yes on Measure A.

Linda Landau

Orinda

Editor:

I, like many other parents in our community, have worked hard to support our local schools – from bake sales and school auctions to helping in the classroom and serving on PTAs. – I've seen firsthand the critical role parents play in providing the funding and manpower necessary to keep our schools competitive. I, like most parents, contribute knowing that our time and dollars are an investment in the future. Now, with a son heading off to high school in the fall, I worry about what that future holds for him.

Over the past four years, the State of California has cut funding to the Acalanes High School District by more than \$8 million. With the resulting elimination of more than 50 teaching positions, class size will increase, course selection will decrease, and our students will suffer.

If ever there was a need for an emergency measure to save our schools, it's today. Where the state has let us down, Measure A provides an immediate answer to an unacceptable situation. It allows local voters to direct local tax dollars directly to our local classrooms. Please join me in voting yes for Measure A.

Heather O'Donnell
Moraga

Editor:

Having been raised in Europe, I was deeply touched by the support and help by my neighbors and even people I hardly knew when my husband fell ill and died a few years ago. This spontaneous offer to help is a central part of our American Culture that keeps our families safe and our society healthy. Another leg of a healthy society is a solid and consistent education of the children in the community. Acalanes Union High School District is facing a \$4.8 million budget cut resulting in the loss of over 50 full time teaching positions! This will cut deeply into the curriculum, eliminating•

most art, drama, choir or advanced placement classes. Orinda's schools have been among the top public schools in California and the•

country. With the imminent budget cut, this excellence is suffering a slow death. Our teachers agreed to five furlough days, cutting their salaries by 2.5 percent. It is time for us remember that we always help our neighbors in times of severe difficulties. This is one of those times. I urge you to support Measure A's \$112 per parcel annual tax and with that to support the young generation in our community.

Petra Michel
Orinda

Editor:

We are proud to say our two children received a well rounded and lasting education in the Acalanes Union High School District. They have both told us that they were very well prepared for college. We no longer have children in the district but we see the upcoming Measure A \$112 parcel tax as a "no brainer" and we fully support its passage. Our children are the future of this community, our state and the nation. We must give them a chance to be educated and enriched so that they can each contribute to society in their own unique way.

We know these are difficult economic times and everyone is looking to spend their money as carefully as possible. We believe that supporting Measure A is a sound investment in our future and will help insure that the next generation will have the greatest chance to impact our community in a positive way. Please support Measure A with your Yes vote.

Paula Reinman and Sandy Gross
Orinda

Editor:

I am writing to urge readers to Vote Yes on Measure A to avoid drastic cuts to our top rated but already under-funded Acalanes Union High School District . With five teenagers (yes, 5!) with a diverse set of talents and interests, our family provides a good example of how all students will be impacted if Measure A does not pass. Our junior who is interested in engineering or medicine will only be able to take one science class, and find it tough to compete for college admissions against kids who have had the freedom to focus on math and science. Our sophomore who has a knack for history and has found his voice through Public Speaking could see that award-winning and state-ranked program eliminated. Our children entering high school will have a shorter six period day with no electives, and will have to fight to get basic foreign language and science classes. Non-core classes that foster leadership and spirit so essential to the high school experience would be eliminated. All will face much larger class sizes.

Measure A is necessary to give us the local, reliable funding we need to close the budget gap. We have learned that our district receives substantially lower funding than others because the property taxes we collect do not cover the cost of our schools. Piedmont, a district with comparable test scores and property tax situation, has an annual parcel tax of \$2,500. At \$112 per parcel (less than 31 cents per day), Measure A would bring annual parcel taxes in our district to just \$301 – a fraction of Piedmont's, with similar quality results.

We need to continue to fight for education reform in California , but cannot afford to risk our children's educational experience over the next five years in the process. Once programs are cut, they can take years to restore. Measure A is the only solution for maintaining programs in the short term while we push for longer term structural reform.

Please join us in voting Yes on Measure A!

Kim Loughton and Steve Maupin

Editor:

I would like to add my voice in support of the passage of Measure A, the parcel tax to provide emergency support to the high schools in the Acalanes Union High School District. Clearly this action is required to avoid the erosion of the quality of our schools.

Sincerely,
Steve Harwood
Orinda

Editor:

The Mirador arrived in the mail today. Having a freshman at Miramonte, we are treated to this quality publication every month. This is one newspaper I look forward to reading cover to cover. It is full of local and national news commentary, editorial insight, and colorful vignettes of high school life. Produced in the Journalism class, it is professional, well organized, and well written.

If Measure A doesn't pass, Journalism will be yesterday's news. Not only would this be a loss to the Mirador's readership, many staff members who have career goals in writing would be without this training. Past writers have gone on to receive awards, college placements, and news-related jobs due to their early training here.

This is just one program that is in jeopardy if Measure A isn't passed. All electives and Leadership, which often give birth to career inspiration, would be gone. Over 50 teachers would lose their positions, and we would lose people who are devoted to our children and are inspired to teach by the quality of our schools.

Please join us and vote YES on Measure A.

Jane and Chip Wiser
Orinda

Dear Editor:

It has been my privilege to attend Campolindo High School for four years. I can honestly say that my educational experience has been extraordinary.

The greatest thing about Campolindo is the accessibility to teachers and counselors. Teachers are happy to donate time after school and during prep periods to ensure that students understand the material. They relate to us as individuals rather than treating us all the same.

The same applies to our high school counselors. Though their primary role is to make sure we take the right classes to graduate, that is only the beginning. They spend individual time with students and help find classes that suit our interests and goals. I can say personally that without Mrs. Ballard, the college application process would have been overwhelming. I must have made ten appointments to see her this year and each time I left feeling more informed and relaxed. There is no way to accurately put into words how big a mistake it would be to get rid of these teachers and counselors. These individuals make Campolindo the competitive and successful school that it is. It is necessary that that Measure A passes.

Emily Brennan
Moraga

Dear Editor,

In the last few weeks my husband and I were wowed at Campolindo High School's spring concert as well as the school's musical production of Titanic. We are relatively new to Moraga and are simply staggered by the quality and depth of musical instruction here, not to mention the overall quality of instruction and teacher dedication.

When we moved from Sacramento, we chose Moraga specifically for its amazing schools, and we are committed to upholding their quality. Even after three years of budget cuts, the Acalanes District high schools have managed to maintain the highest API scores in the state, but the state's fiscal crisis and the additional \$4.8 million in cuts we now face will cut the legs out from under our top ratings.

The passage of Measure A on May 4th is the answer. This temporary parcel tax of only \$112 per year for five years will stop the elimination of more than 50 teaching posts planned for May 15th. And it will protect classroom programs that teach science, foreign language, English, social studies, arts and mathematics.

Lamorinda's commitment to education has direct benefits of strong community values and high property values. Let's preserve both with the passage of Measure A.

Sincerely,

Diane Moe
Moraga

Dear Editor,

We are writing to urge your readers to join us in voting YES on Measure A. The Acalanes Union High School District is the highest performing high school district in California despite being at the bottom of the list for state funding. We are able to provide an excellent educational experience for our students due to local funding which fills the gap left by continued budget cuts from the state. That gap is about to get wider. The AUHSD is facing a \$4.8 million budget deficit and will need to eliminate approximately 50 qualified teachers, 7th period classes, and numerous elective and enrichment programs. Our outstanding schools risk being reduced to average ones. Their excellent reputations are in jeopardy, negatively impacting not only students but homeowners alike. The cost of Measure A (\$112/year for 5 years) is miniscule compared to the benefits we all reap from our outstanding public high schools. The local funding life line is critical to ensure our schools continue to perform at the exceptional level for which they are known and respected. Please show your commitment to public education and vote YES on Measure A.

Dan and Kathe Friel
Orinda

To the Editor:

As a former teacher and administrator, I strongly urge you to consider voting Yes on Measure A. Having worked in Orinda and other school districts in the bay area, I can say that our public schools are the jewel in the crown of our community, due to a phenomenal combination of student talent, financial support, parent involvement and high district standards. I'm always pleased, but not surprised, to hear of my former Orinda students' achievements and successes.

Superintendent Stockton has outlined the dire circumstances facing the district and the aggressive action taken by employees to mitigate the financial situation, ranging from severe reductions in administrative staff, to rarely heard of teacher compensation cuts. Sadly, after three years of significant cuts, the district faces further cutbacks, effecting numerous academic offerings and potential loss of over 50 teaching positions, which may limit or eliminate important programs that contribute to the academic excellence found in our high schools.

Remember, Measure A is only temporary and will sunset in five years. At \$112 per parcel, it is important that we support this emergency measure to maintain the quality of our schools during this difficult budget crisis.

Pamela Goode
Orinda

Dear Editor:

Why is the Acalanes Unified School District back seeking a new parcel tax just months after voters extended the existing one? Because since November 2009, state cuts for the 2009-10 school year unexpectedly doubled to almost \$5 million.

Our well-run district can't keep up. The district has already cut management positions by 20%. Remaining teachers and district administrators agreed to five unpaid furlough days and fewer benefits. Class sizes have steadily increased. The only thing left to cut are award-winning academic programs. Once these programs are decimated, they may never return.

We moved here two years ago primarily because of the quality of education available. We realize now why homes sell for a premium and why so many stay to raise their families here. Our community is a great place to live. Our schools are a major part of that.

We have a choice: continue the tradition of investing in our children's exemplary education, or abandon them to mediocrity. Don't punish our kids because you're angry with Sacramento. A citizen's advisory committee will ensure that 100% of Measure A funds will be spent in local classrooms.

Keep AUHSD #1. Join me in voting Yes on Measure A!

Wendy Poling
Lafayette

Dear Concerned Community,

Measure A is an important way that we can mitigate drastic budget cuts being forced upon our district by the state. They will, if unaddressed by this parcel tax, result in a very negative change to the educational experience of our children.

It is an unfortunate fact that we are being asked to increase our taxes at this time, but our community has rallied in the past to invest in educational quality. As a result of that investment, we can be proud that our district has been ranked at the top academically. Three of our schools recently received "gold" and "silver" designations as some of the nation's top-ranked public schools.

Our students are achieving great success within the challenging environment provided by the district. The breadth and depth of their command of knowledge has helped them successfully compete at top Universities. The value of

this to our community is very high indeed.

We should renew our commitment to quality education in this community and invest for the future by passing this five-year parcel tax. Yes on Measure A for Lamorinda.

Submitted with commitment by

DD and Paul Felton

Orinda

Dear Editor:

I grew up in Moraga and attended the local schools, the same schools that my children attend today. Back then, like now, our community believed and invested in high quality education.

I am heavily involved in my children's school and understand how devastating the past three years have been for public education. Despite the years of cuts, our high school district has managed to stay at the top. While my children are still in grade school, looking ahead to high school, I worry that our children will be unable to compete without the programs offered at our local high schools. I also worry, as a Moraga resident, that our home values will decrease if we don't continue to support our schools.

Unfortunately, today we cannot rely on California to maintain its investment in public education. Measure A provides temporary relief for our high schools until the economy stabilizes. It is an emergency measure in response to crippling cuts to the District budget. For only 31 cents a day, we can protect the programs and curriculum that have made our high schools consistently amongst the top rated in California, and among the top in the nation.

Please vote yes on Measure A.

Fiona Artiaga

Moraga

Editor:

Growing up in California, I had the good fortune to attend public schools that were the benchmark for the nation. The California dream of a quality education for all has been tarnished. Fortunately, my daughters live in a community where education is still a top priority. California currently ranks near the bottom of the nation in education yet our schools rank in the top. The quality of local schools characterizes our community as much as the beautiful rolling hills and view of Mt Diablo. This quality education is thanks in large part to the tremendous wisdom of voters who believe education is a priority and have approved previous school parcel taxes.

It's frustrating to hear politicians run on a platform of education; yet, year after year, our schools receive less than the natural average. And now, in just the past three years, we've seen our schools lose even more ground as Sacramento continues to play games with the budget. It's enough to make a cynic throw up her arms in disgust. But, we choose optimism over cynicism. We've seen time and again that the best way to overcome the gridlock of Sacramento politics is through local action. And that's why we're supporting Measure A. It's a local solution that benefits our local high schools. With Measure A, we can save critical core classes in math, science, and English, as well as music and libraries. Without Measure A, 75 teachers stand to lose their jobs, students risk not getting the classes they need to enter college, and our community's investment in our schools will erode.

We urge all voters who care about schools, care about the community, and care about our future to vote yes on Measure A.

Jane & Nicholas Hyde

Orinda

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA