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Letters to the Editor

Editor,

I love my Town. I live in a Town where Eagle Scouts build fences, Girl Scouts develop safety programs and churches build houses in Mexico. I live in a Town where moms make dinners for other mom's after babies or surgeries or during difficult times. I live in a Town where the opposing soccer coach carries my injured daughter to the car and another stops by our house to check on her. I live in a community where my child's beloved "blankie" was found at a large sporting event and carefully set aside amid the thousands of people coming and going during the events of the day. I live in a Town that wants to protect its natural beauty and ridgelines.

Sadly, I also live in a Town that will allow a retailer like Dollar Tree to exist: a store that only contributes to the overflow of landfills with junk and diminishes the integrity of our community. The Dollar Tree is a contradiction to the culture of our Town. We show such care and respect for our neighbors and community, yet will support a business that willfully adds to the deterioration of our planet and contributes to chemically related health risks.

Aside from the potential environmental risks of Dollar Tree products, there is a danger to our children's sense of value. Our children should understand what a "value" is. It is not getting something for \$1.00 that they don't need.

A value is getting the best possible quality at the best possible price. A retailer should have integrity when presenting a "value." The Dollar Tree sells merchandise of poor and often dangerous quality. Are we teaching our kids that if something is "only a \$1.00" you should buy it? Children should know that \$1.00 is not disposable. It has value, should be earned, saved and spent on something planned. The Dollar Tree is counting on our community to spend thousands of dollars on impulse buys because "hey, it's only a buck." Don't we have more pride? Let's get back to the core of what makes this Town great: honesty, integrity and authenticity.

I DO love my Town and it is worth more than a dollar.

Lucy Dendinger

Moraga

Editor:

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all those who immediately came forward to offer help last month after I tumbled from my bike on School Street while taking my granddaughter to Lafayette Elementary School. "Thank you!" to wonderful neighbors who made sure that Lydia got to school on time and who took her home after school that day. A special thanks to the good samaritan who secured my bike and who insisted on staying with me until the ambulance arrived. As I sit at home recovering from surgery to repair a fractured knee it is a good feeling to know that when a crisis occurs Lafayette residents can be counted on for meaningful assistance.

With appreciation,

Louise Morgan

Lafayette

Editor:

As the spokesperson for the Dollar Tree appeal group, I want to publicly thank our appellant team Lynn Davis, Kathy Macchi, Stephanie Kusinski, and Cavan McCarthy for their herculean efforts and sincere friendship. I also want to thank the hundreds of Moragans who spoke at Planning Commission and Town Council meetings, signed our petition, participated in our blog, wrote letters and emails to the Town and local newspapers, and called and emailed us personally to voice their concern and support for our appeal. I was so impressed and proud of my fellow Morgans who spoke so thoughtfully and eloquently about how much this town and our families mean to all of us, and our concerns for its future direction.

What started out as a troubling addition to the Rheem Center four months ago, turned into a full time job for a group of already busy supermoms. We frantically researched the business practices of a multi national, five billion dollar corporation, combed through countless product standards and consumer protection regulations, navigated local politics, actually studied the Moraga General Plan and the Municipal Code, and wrote and presented statements and briefs for Planning Commissioners and Town Council Members. The more we investigated Dollar Tree, the more egregious violations surfaced and that our Municipal Code left our Planning Commission powerless to stop them. Consistently ranked by Forbes Magazine in the top 10 of the "World's Most Least Desirable Retailers", we now understood why. Dollar Tree's current business model of warehouse merchandising, short cuts in quality, flagrant safety noncompliance and violating Federal and State regulations, separate them from all other retailers - and by the way, it's NOT a bargain, but a rip off and we have the numbers to prove it!

We gave the Town Council a hefty dose of evidence on product safety violations, and proof that the Dollar Tree is non-compliant with our General Plan and Municipal Codes - unfortunately it fell on deaf ears. And as disappointed as we now feel, we are encouraged that our new Town Manager, Jill Keimach has invited us to share what we have learned while fostering more community involvement in the process. Hopefully we can be a part of positive change that will ensure the quality of Moraga retailers to come; after all we are so very fortunate to live in this wonderful community.

Hollie Lucas-Alcalay
Moraga

Editor,

At the risk of repeating myself, I must write once again to explain why it is NOT TRUE that Orinda is subsidizing Moraga's fire services. It pains me to even discuss whether or not one city is subsidizing the other since we are all ONE district. But, if you want to analyze the tax revenue contributions of one area compared to another, it is necessary to begin with correct assumptions in order to reach an accurate conclusion.

Historically, the old Moraga Fire District included 700 Orinda homes. Our city boundaries are not the same as the old fire district boundaries and, in fact, both the Moraga and the Orinda Fire Districts pre-dated the incorporation of either city. MOFD operations today utilize the same "service areas" as the old fire districts - in other words, the service areas are the same as the old fire district boundaries. MOFD operates according to these service area boundaries because our five fire stations were located decades ago using response time guidelines which are still relevant today. Logically then, any analysis of tax revenues must use the service area boundaries, not the city limits to reach an accurate conclusion.

While I admire Steve Cohn's detailed analysis of the number of responses from Orinda into Moraga and vice versa, and how much money the City of Orinda pays versus the Town of Moraga, the fact is that all of these numbers are meaningless and irrelevant because they are based on city boundaries. If you do the calculations based on service areas instead of city limits, it becomes clear that Orinda is NOT subsidizing Moraga.

Ellen Dale
Orinda

Editor:

An accident waiting to happen.

Everyone was thrilled when the new Veteran's Memorial Building on Lafayette Blvd was completed. It's a smartly designed community focal point and an asset to the area. However, it has inadequate parking facilities for its attendees, and it is not uncommon for cars to overflow onto the private driveways in the vicinity. When leaving the business at the Oak Hill Office complex on Oct. 26 there were cars parked on both sides of the steep, unlit, private drive to the complex and the narrow passage was filled with pedestrians navigating their way to their vehicles in the dark. The conditions were very unsafe and literally an 'accident waiting to happen'.

The veterans building should take responsibility for directing visitors where to park when lots are full, and shouldn't compromise its positive position in the community by allowing unnecessary risks to occur.

Heidi Perryman, Ph.D.
Erika Goldstein, Ph.D.
Lafayette

Dear Editor,

With Thanksgiving and the Holiday Season upon us, it is a wonderful time to reflect upon all that is good within our community. The recent Women's Empowerment Forum held at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center was a perfect example of giving and sharing.

Leading business women in the area shared their experiences of transitions within their businesses, organizations and their personal lives. The panelists included: D.D. Felton, Susan Goldie, Susan Foord, Leila Douglass, Theresa Wellen, Kathy Bowles, Debbie Swiggert, Connie Collier, Sheila Taylor, Anne Grodin and Melody Howe Weintraub. Kathy Merchant of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation welcomed everyone and invited all to upcoming programs provided by the Library and Learning Center. She then introduced the moderator, Heather Quarterman, news Director and Co-host of the Hometown Morning Show on 92.1 KKDV and 101.7 KKIQ. Heather did a superb job of creating a lively and upbeat atmosphere for the audience and panelists. The main themes that resonated within the panelists and audience were; to do what you love, work hard, and the importance of volunteering within your own community.

The over 160 guests were invited to visit the following resource tables: Brandman University, Pink Purse Ventures, LLC, East Bay Works One Stop Career Center and Successful Solutions Consulting.

A special thank you to the following who contributed to the success of the event: Tea Cakes, Willowstone Catering, La Boulange de Lafayette, Bookmark Caf, Amarin Thai, Mangia, Lamorinda Weekly, Skin Care by Timberly, The Bistro at the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa, Jamba Juice, iVideo Media Productions, Deborah Kwan, Susan Sohrakoff, Timberly Scott, The Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation, Serendipity Jewels and Caryl Morrison of Successful Solutions Consulting.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who came and participated at our first Empowerment of Women's Forum.

Sincerely,
Barbara Gilmore
Lafayette

Editor:

Huge welcome, not, to the Dollar Tree. I was going to get creative and suggest a possible retail establishment for the remaining majority of empty spaces, but laziness got in the way. However, I can now see the Town Council's

wisdom and how we and that wonderful realty company can fill the vacancies. We certainly need at least 2 more dry cleaners and additional fume-spewing manicure/pedicure establishments, but we are sorely lacking a massage parlor, pawn shop, and many more fast food establishments. By the way, has anyone visited our local BK lately? It had been a while for me, but it is filthier than ever. That play room has always been gross, but it has reached a new high.

Anyway, I still love Moraga, but who, exactly, is getting the word out about our lovely family community that might be better served by an IHOP (seriously), a clean, sit-down pizza restaurant (like Pennini's), etc? Anyway, nothing is allowed to survive here that comes close to a "nice place" because the goal is to vacate the premises for shootholes like Dollar Tree.

Jari Hazard
Moraga

Editor:

We Won! and It's Not Over.

Over the past few weeks, I have received hundreds of calls, letters and email from supporters who are both shocked and distraught over the outcome of the November 2 Orinda Union School District Board of Trustees election. However, to my mind - we have won! The entire purpose of my candidacy was to shed light on the existing practices of the Board and the District - from the tradition of giving bonuses to the Superintendent while laying off teachers and taking money from classrooms, to the top-down style of management, unresponsive to parent, teacher and community opinion.

The wagon trains circled, and prominent "insiders" demonstrated their willingness to commit libel/slander, ad hominem attacks and more in order to maintain the status quo and continue the institution of a 'self-perpetuating', hand picked School Board. But the genie is out of the bottle - and it is now our responsibility to keep the momentum going and encourage the new Board to increase transparency, be responsive to parent, teacher and community opinion, promote fiscal integrity and advance 21st Century student skills and project-based learning. To read about last month's meeting (or to watch it in case you were not able to attend) visit my new blog "The Orinda Schools Report Card" - www.bekki Gilbert.com. (One particularly hot agenda item was the "Revised OUSD Management Salary Schedule" - Central Management salaries increased by almost 50% from 2005-2010 from a 6 figure base). The next OUSD Board meeting is on Monday, December 6, 2010, 4pm, 8 Altarinda Road.

See you there!

Thank you,
Bekki Van Voorhis-Gilbert
Orinda

Editor:

I was honored to receive the support of the community, and the confidence of the voters in being re-elected to the Orinda City Council. It is with sincere gratitude that I thank my many endorsers and supporters. I look forward to continuing to serve the community, and plan to work closely with you as citizens and with the new council to make Orinda an even better place to live.

Sue Severson
Orinda

Editor:

Wasting money has become the hallmark of the Orinda Union School District (OUSD).

OUSD's superintendent, Joe Jaconette, in commenting on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2010-2011 education budget, said on the district's Web site: "A preliminary analysis of our [OUSD's] budget for next year [2010-2011] projects a deficit of \$678,000." Jaconette's comments, while undated, can be found at <www.ousd.schoolwires.com>.

Despite a difficult economic environment, OUSD's current Schedule of Management Salaries shows, for 2010-2011, proposed salary increases for the district's Superintendent (Mr. Jaconette), the Business Director, and the Curriculum Director.

These three positions received salaries of \$513,000 in 2007-2008 school year. But, for the 2010-2011 school year, the projected salaries jump to \$562,000 -- an increase of almost \$50,000. This increase could be used to hire new teachers or cut property taxes.

Increasing district salaries during bad economic times is intolerable. A Web search of local real estate shows that 48 Orinda properties, between May and November 2010, are in foreclosure. Moreover, California's current rate of unemployment of 12.4 percent has not been this high since 1940.

The Board of Trustees of OUSD should eliminate all salary increases. If the board fails to act responsibly with money, then the board should resign.

Richard S. Colman
Orinda

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