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# LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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Wednesday, December 22, 2010



Practicing happiness: The O'Donnell family — Michael, Kathryn, Brendan (15), Julian (11), Audrey (14) and Mikey (8) — clowns around while enjoying a rousing game of Lafayetteopoly (just released by Lafayette Partners in Education - see ad page L3). Photo Doug Kohen

# The Science of Happiness

By Lou Fancher

*Happiness.*

*Thomas Jefferson told us to pursue it.  
Mark Twain warned us it could not be combined with sanity.  
Helen Keller directed us to find it in "fidelity to a worthy purpose."  
And last month, thousands scurried to barely-morning retail openings in hopes of buying it on Black Friday.*

At the University of California, Berkeley, happiness is such an important topic, there's an entire department devoted to studying it: the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC).

Advertising

Christine Carter, a sociologist and director of the GGSC parenting program, grew up in Orinda. She moved to the area in the late 1970's and attended Wagner Ranch Elementary School and Orinda Intermediate School.

Her parents, Tim and Sylvia Carter still live in Orinda.

"My parents are very involved with my girls. Not only will I be coming home for the holidays, I have dinner there at least once a week. I'm a working single mother, but I don't even feel that single because my parents are so involved. They've built a separate club house for my kids. Orinda is like Disneyland to them," she said, laughing.

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### Quote of the Week:

"Can't we as a community acknowledge this problem and agree that we can do better?"

Read Letters to the Editor, page A12

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## City Receives Free Money for Sidewalk Beautification

By Cathy Tyson

Who doesn't like to get something on sale? With a huge boost from a federal grant - brick paving, street furniture, decorative planters, stylish street lights, public art, bike racks and trash cans will beautify a portion of Mt. Diablo Boulevard for a fraction of the cost.

As part of the 2010 Capital Improvement Program, \$350,000 from the Downtown Street Lights Replacement Reserve was allocated to implement the Downtown Street Improvements Master Plan - to spruce up just one block along Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Seeking to leverage city funds, staff applied for and received a \$1,290,000 federal grant that would

fund the entire Master Plan from Oak Hill Road all the way to Mt. View/Dolores Drive.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said new mayor Carl Anduri.

Streetscape architect Sudhish Mohindroo, a partner in SZFM Design Studio that worked on the Lafayette Mercantile Building and the renovation of La Fiesta Square, is the architect of the project. A preliminary design was presented to the City Council on December 13. Looking to gain acceptance of general design concepts and get clarification on two major issues was the focus of the presentation. ... continued on page A2

## Secret Snowflake - Kids Giving to Kids

By Lee Borrowman

Christmas came a few days early for students at Concord's Cambridge Elementary School, courtesy of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School's Secret Snowflake program. At least 700 new toys were donated this year by the Moraga school's students, families and friends - the gifts were wrapped and brought to Cambridge last Friday as students gleefully headed into the long winter break.

Two days before the donation deadline, however, it looked as if there would not be enough toys for all of the Cambridge students, the vast majority of whom come from low-income families.

Joaquin Moraga (JM) math teacher Brett Lorie, who has spearheaded the Secret Snowflake program for nine years with fellow teacher Jerry Gruen, says they usually collect about 750 toys each December. But in this economically challenging year, "It took us longer to hit our goal; it seems as if fewer kids brought in gifts, but those that did brought in more gifts on average."

A desperate plea went out two days before the donation deadline, spreading virally at the hands of supportive JM teachers and staff. Only 300 toys had been donated; the youngest Cambridge students would receive gifts, but the older ones might not unless more toys marched through JM's doors. ... continued on page L10

## Decorating for the Holidays—Just Do It



By Andrea A. Firth

For Nikolene Isely, decorating for the holidays is a joy not a chore. "Making your home festive for the holidays is a creative process," says Isely, the owner of Staging by Design in Moraga. "It's important to be spontaneous and to try something new. That's what makes it fun.

... read on page L1

## Meet The Elusive Immigrant



By Lou Fancher

Meeting with an accountant normally doesn't leave a person gasping for air—except perhaps, when contemplating the wide berth between one's ways and one's means—but interviewing John Benzie, retired accountant and Orinda author, is breathtaking.

... read on page L4

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