

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 05 Issue 19 Wednesday, November 23, 2011



Home Sales and Foreclosures

...read on page D2

All in the Family: Second Generation Homeowners

By Cathy Dausman



The Jacobsen family in their living room

Photo provided

Local realtors tout quality of life in Lamorinda, and residents tend to stay put. Some have even moved into the house

their parents originally owned. They are proud Second Generation Homeowners.

Bill Leone is one example. His

parents bought a single story rancher in Lafayette in 1965. Leone marveled at the home's "high" price (\$46,000) because it had a pool. After 20 years

in a two-story Walnut Creek home, Leone and his wife were ready to downsize. "I started thinking about stairs," he says. His family had rented out the Lafayette home after his father's death, but it suffered water damage and needed remodeling. "Let's not rent," said Leone to his wife, "let's remodel and move in." Their children supported them, and Leone was ready to take on a project (he's doing some of the work himself). Renovations include a new master bedroom wing, new bathrooms and a new kitchen. He wants to make the house "as green as possible," and make it his own. There are even future plans for a wood shop. Leone admits it was "weird, at first, to move into my mom's house." But he loves the fact that it is single story, and close to schools and the Lafayette-Moraga bike trail. He brags playfully that he can even have an extra beer when dining out because he can walk home. The couple expects to move in by Christmas.

As Miramonte classmates, Susan and Keith Jacobsen are longtime Orinda residents. Keith's grandfather built his home even before Susan's parents built their home in 1948. Susan's mother, Anne, grew up on Oahu and designed the living room bay windows "to bring the outside in."

... continued on page D3

Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

City	Last reported:	LOWEST AMOUNT:	HIGHEST AMOUNT:
LAFAYETTE	10	\$459,000	\$1,485,000
MORAGA	7	\$130,000	\$2,650,000
ORINDA	7	\$557,000	\$3,450,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal REsource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California REsource. Neither Cal REsource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

LAFAYETTE

- 437 Donegal Way, \$470,000, 3 Bdrms, 1836 SqFt, 1967 YrBlt, 10-26-11;
Previous Sale: \$530,000, 09-11-09
- 3103 Gloria Terrace, \$690,000, 4 Bdrms, 3164 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 10-20-11;
Previous Sale: \$810,000, 05-27-03
- 3208 Lucas Circle, \$619,500, 3 Bdrms, 1612 SqFt, 1963 YrBlt, 10-20-11;
Previous Sale: \$52,500, 01-09-78
- 3445 Moraga Boulevard, \$459,000, 2 Bdrms, 768 SqFt, 1961 YrBlt, 10-21-11;
Previous Sale: \$218,500, 12-05-90
- 3224 Palomares Avenue, \$620,000, 3 Bdrms, 1109 SqFt, 1953 YrBlt, 10-14-11;
Previous Sale: \$525,000, 10-10-02
- 50 Ridgecrest Court, \$1,485,000, 4 Bdrms, 4455 SqFt, 1988 YrBlt, 10-26-11;
Previous Sale: \$1,270,000, 02-05-01
- 41 Shadow Hill Road, \$675,000, 3 Bdrms, 2065 SqFt, 1967 YrBlt, 10-25-11
- 3357 South Lucille Lane, \$690,000, 3 Bdrms, 1671 SqFt, 1955 YrBlt, 10-21-11
- 3479 Stage Coach Drive, \$1,080,000, 4 Bdrms, 2949 SqFt, 1989 YrBlt, 10-14-11;
Previous Sale: \$670,000, 05-28-93
- 1116 Upper Happy Valley Road, \$1,040,000, 4 Bdrms, 2091 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 10-18-11;
Previous Sale: \$699,000, 07-28-00

MORAGA

- 203 Alderbrook Place, \$800,000, 4 Bdrms, 2478 SqFt, 1968 YrBlt, 10-14-11;
Previous Sale: \$1,171,500, 10-10-07
- 1971 Ascot Drive #C, \$180,000, 2 Bdrms, 938 SqFt, 1971 YrBlt, 10-21-11;
Previous Sale: \$390,000, 05-10-05
- 1434 Camino Peral, \$335,000, 3 Bdrms, 1348 SqFt, 1971 YrBlt, 10-19-11;
Previous Sale: \$555,000, 10-31-07
- 2133 Donald Drive #18, \$130,000, 1 Bdrms, 560 SqFt, 1963 YrBlt, 10-26-11;
Previous Sale: \$265,000, 08-25-04
- 80 Lynwood Place, \$2,650,000, 5 Bdrms, 5293 SqFt, 1978 YrBlt, 10-21-11;
Previous Sale: \$3,000,000, 09-01-06
- 158 Selborne Way, \$1,075,000, 5 Bdrms, 2433 SqFt, 1964 YrBlt, 10-26-11;
Previous Sale: \$1,299,000, 03-28-06
- 272 Tharp Drive, \$687,500, 3 Bdrms, 1580 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 10-14-11;
Previous Sale: \$687,500, 10-14-11

ORINDA

- 52 Camino Encinas, \$590,000, 5 Bdrms, 2116 SqFt, 1957 YrBlt, 10-20-11;
Previous Sale: \$616,000, 03-04-03
- 175 Canon Drive, \$945,000, 3 Bdrms, 2257 SqFt, 1973 YrBlt, 10-20-11;
Previous Sale: \$1,200,000, 08-22-06
- 5 Canyon View Drive, \$3,450,000, 4 Bdrms, 4672 SqFt, 2003 YrBlt, 10-21-11
- 139 Fiesta Circle, \$557,000, 4 Bdrms, 1369 SqFt, 1957 YrBlt, 10-25-11
- 70 Monte Vista Road, \$1,260,000, 1 Bdrms, 2057 SqFt, 1947 YrBlt, 10-21-11
- 170 Ravenhill Road, \$801,000, 3 Bdrms, 2245 SqFt, 1981 YrBlt, 10-20-11
- Skyline Boulevard, \$1,176,500, 10-14-11

Lamorinda Foreclosures recorded

LAFAYETTE

- Jennie Court, 94549, Wells Fargo Bank, 10-13-11, \$662,818, 2392 sf, 5 bd
- Sunset Loop, 94549, Sami Trust, 10-21-11, \$479,250, 1023 sf, 3 bd



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Top 4 Opportunities in 2011

- 1) Buy foreclosures in select neighborhoods and cities in Contra Costa County, for strong rental income returns, with future appreciation.
- 2) Buy a home in Lafayette, Moraga, or Orinda, in a rare buyer's market.
- 3) Sell in the under \$1,000,000 range in Lamorinda, where sales are now improving, and move up to your dream house in a higher price range where the best negotiating opportunities exist.
- 4) Downsize, and sell in Lamorinda, where the market has not dropped as much, then buy a great one-story home at a bargain price in a nice neighborhood where homes have dropped more. Keep a low property tax by transferring it to the new house within Contra Costa County.

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The ideal time to plant trees and shrubs is during the dormant season-in the fall after their leaves drop or early spring before bud breaks. Weather conditions are cool and allow plants to establish roots in the new location. The proper handling during planting is essential to ensure a healthy future for new trees and shrubs.

So don't wait until it's too late, call your local Arborist at Advance Tree Service and Landscaping to help you find your perfect tree.

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All in the Family: Second Generation Homeowners

... continued from page D1

The sweeping, west-facing view was bare hillside when the family moved there. Now mature redwoods and vegetation envelop the hills. Susan's mother died suddenly in 1971 and "Dad was by himself [in the house]." Two years later he married a neighbor who lived down the block and moved into her house.

At the time, the Jacobsens lived in Montclair. "I really would like you to live in the [family] house," Susan's father told her. A year later, they decided. "We're going!" she said. And they've been there ever since. Jacobsen's thought process was similar to Leone's: "this was my *mother's* house," she said. In time, though, she says you make it your own: "We redid things." Jacobsen's brother, who lives in Oregon with his family, has been supportive of the move. Even after leaving the house her father reminded Jacobsen to water "their" rhododendrons. He died in 1995; her step-mother lives nearby.

Cathie and Doug Barrows and their daughters live in the house Doug's father built in 1947. They moved in after Doug's mother died in 1995. The current Barrows are also Miramonte classmates. They say there are definitely challenges associated with living in an older home: "We have had to remodel a corner of the house to address foundation problems due to Orinda's famously sliding soil," Cathie says. "We've been continually updating over the years we've been here and have more yet to do. Our kitchen is still basically 1947." Overall, though, the Barrows' are "glad to be living in a house that has so much family history, and especially appreciate the mature redwoods, cedars and oaks that Doug's mom planted and nurtured decades ago."

Dana Farkas' family moved to Lafayette from the Oakland area in 1967 for the good schools and the "country feel" of the town. They bought a large home with a pool built in the early 1950's on land that was once walnut and pear orchards. When Farkas' father died 11 years ago, her mother converted part of the house to an apartment and found a renter. The renter left on good terms, but Farkas' life was changing directions.

Farkas, a professional chef and "lifelong renter" had tired of apartment noise in Los Angeles, New Jersey and the San Francisco Peninsula, and wanted to return to her beloved East Bay. She sold her business, went to work for a former client and asked her Mom if she would consider renting the apartment to her. Farkas' grandmother had lived with the family before her death, so both understood multiple generations living under one roof. As Farkas explains, the arrangement works because she and her mother live independently, but enjoy each other's company. They dine together weekly, and help each other out with house and yard work, an important component in caring for their aging home. Farkas says although the house has "issues," (their private road was built atop a creek) living there has allowed her to "get her feet wet in home ownership."

Living in a parents' home is not for everyone, as aging homes may require substantial maintenance, but it does have advantages. For the residents, there is continuity and a sense of history, and, as another homeowner happily volunteered, "Prop 13 is awesome!"



Susan Jacobsen in front of living room bay windows her mother designed

Photo Cathy Dausman

From Parent to Child: A Gift of Love and Lower Taxes

Moving into a parent's home can be a gift that keeps on giving; at least as far as tax assessments are concerned. Normally a change in property ownership triggers a tax reassessment at market rate. However, when one family member gives or sells his or her home to another family member, the parties can file for a parent/child exclusion (Proposition 58) or grandparent/grandchild exclusion (Proposition 193). Then even if the family to family sale price is at full market value, the tax rate may be discounted.

Donna Murdock, Associate Appraiser for Contra Costa County, gives an example: a home owned for 30 years and originally assessed at \$50,000.00 might be assessed at about \$85,000.00 today under its Prop 13 cap (2% per year rate increase, compounded annually). Comparable homes in that same neighborhood not eligible for such an exclusion might be assessed at \$200,000.00 or more and taxed accordingly.

The assessor's office deals purely with home **assessments**. The tax collector and auditor's offices then use the assessed home value to compute the taxes. Actual taxes on homes of similar value can vary based on the home location and voter initiative bond measures (which combined comprise the Part 1 tax rate) and set parcel tax amounts such as East Bay Trails (Part 2). Propositions 13, 58 and 193 details are available online at <http://www.boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/faqs/propositions58.htm>, and <http://boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/faqs/caproptaxprop.htm#2>. Murdock suggests calling the Assessor's Office (925-313-7400) with questions. "We are here to help guide you through the process," she says.

C.Dausman

Protecting Home and Hearth

Orinda Police Chief Talks Home and Holiday Safety

By Laurie Snyder



Jeffrey Jennings, Orinda's Police Chief, wants everyone to have a safe and happy holiday season. Photo courtesy City of Orinda

“Safety is knowing your neighbors,” says Jeffrey Jennings, Orinda's Chief of Police. “You are your own best defense.”

That concept is never more uppermost in the minds of Jennings and his officers than during the holidays when many area residents leave home for treasured times with loved ones.

It's important, says Jennings, to give neighbors a heads' up when you are leaving town. There are far more residents than there are police, and neighbors are capable of noticing suspicious behavior much more quickly because they are the ones most familiar with their area's daily routine – who currently has a housekeeper coming in and on what days, who has contractors performing work or regular pool service, or who or will be expecting UPS or FedEx deliveries.

One great way to get to know neighbors, says Jennings, is to form a Neighborhood Watch, but even if you don't have the time or are not a “joiner,” you can still help keep your community safe.

When you know your neighbors, you're in a great position to spot something out of the ordinary for the time and day in your area – a car that has always parked at one house on a Tuesday is now suddenly parking there on a Saturday while the homeowner is away, a worker arriving with someone you've never seen before, an odd experience happens with a delivery or utility visit.

“We're looking for behavior that doesn't fit the norm,” Jennings says.

And call the police dispatch number right away if you see something, urges Jeannette Irving, the Chief's assistant. All too often, she says, residents will phone a day or two after witnessing something, delaying out of fear that they will appear “silly” or “nosey.” By then, it's usually too late for the police to take action.

If residents do see something odd, Jennings suggests that they try to get license plate numbers when cars are involved – but only if they can do so safely. “Use your cell phone camera and photograph the plate or the person.”

Chief Jennings also strongly suggests that Orinda residents make use of two home security programs that are offered free of charge by the Orinda Police Department.

The first – a vacation check program – enables residents to have police drive by and check on their homes while they're away. Just swing by the department's office at the City Hall and fill out a small green index card, and you'll be able to leave the worrying to the police. (Moraga Police also offer a Vacation House Watch program; go to <http://police.moraga.ca.us/links.php>).

Home Security Audits

Orinda, says Jennings with pride, is known as one of the safest cities per capita in the nation. The burglaries committed in the community have, to date, been unarmed and non-confrontational.

But those who have experienced break-ins have still reported a sense of violation – an experience sometimes so traumatic that homeowners have felt compelled to sell their previously peaceful sanctuaries.

“The same reasons why you bought your home are the reasons burglars find it attractive,” explains Jennings. Recessed driveways and landscaping that affords privacy makes life easier for those looking to commit crimes of opportunity.

So, the Chief is also encouraging Orindans to participate in the City's free home security audit program. The audits are conducted by an actual Orinda Police Department officer, and take approximately 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the number of questions the resident has and issues that may be uncovered during the review.

For many residents who have already gone through the process, the audits have affirmed that they are already employing sound self defense strategies. Others have received advice on ways to upgrade their security procedures.

The changes recommended are usually simple: ensuring that window locks are in working order and used when residents are out of the home, home address numbers are

made clearly visible from the street, shrubbery is cleared away from windows and doors, and making sure valuables or tools are not left out for burglars to steal or use when committing their crimes. Additionally, the installation of solid wood doors to withstand door kicks, an alarm system, and enhanced lighting around doorways and in the backyard will also make homes safer.

Residents may also do their own security checks informally, using the handy checklist that is available on the City's web site: <http://www.ci.orinda.ca.us/>.

“Your home should be a sanctuary where you feel safe,” says the Chief.

To make sure your ducks are in a row before heading out of town for the holidays, call the Orinda Police Department to arrange for a security audit: (925) 254-6820. Appointments are scheduled Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to noon and from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Before You Go:

1. Swing by the Orinda Police Department to arrange for vacation checks. Let trusted neighbors know your schedule, and ask them to keep a look out. Also make sure they have your emergency contact information.

2. Arrange for a neighbor, friend, or house sitter to pick up your mail, UPS/Fed Ex deliveries, and newspapers on a daily basis, or ask the Post Office and delivery companies to hold onto your materials until you return.

If you'll be gone for more than a week, ask the same person to make sure that your trash and recycling bins are taken to the curb and returned to the house.

3. Make sure that everyone with access to your home knows how to properly operate the alarm system so that no false alarms are triggered.

The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

by Andi Peterson Brown

It's beginning to look a lot like the most wonderful time of the year. And if your home is still on the market, you might be contemplating pulling it for the winter. But you might want to hold that thought. Even though real estate activity tends to decline during November and December, the season can in fact be a great opportunity to showcase your home in its holiday best.

Buyers who are out looking during the holidays are usually more serious about their search. To capture their hearts and secure a sale, here are some quick and easy tips for holiday staging.

Tip #1: Keep it natural, keep it simple. While it might be tempting to display your cardboard cut-out Buddy The Elf or put your Clark Griswold skills to the test, it's best to keep things simple and natural at your front door. Beautiful wreaths, poinsettias, and tasteful, classic twinkle lights will put buyers in the spirit and make a lasting first impression.

Tip #2: Keep it natural, keep it neutral. It's important for buyers to see themselves living in your home, and universals such as winter greenery, decorative candles, pine cones, and glass jars of candy canes and marshmallows all invoke the warmth of the holidays and spread good cheer to the widest pool of buyers.

These tips, coupled with the fact that Lamorinda currently has a very low housing supply, might just make the difference for that one buyer. And remember: it only takes one.



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136 Manzanita
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101 Brookline Street
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675 Carroll Drive
Walking distance to town, schools, trails, parks & more. Private .31 ac lot w/attractive landscaping, grass play area, veggie gardens. 3bd/2ba updated thruout - baths, kitchen, hdwd flrs, dual panes, crown moldings, lighting, more. **Offered at \$699,000**



41 Greenfield Drive
Spacious Harold Smith 3bd/3ba rancher, lg kitchen/fam rm combo. Gorgeous backyard w/lvl lawn & patio. Convenient location close to schools, shopping, trails, park & transportation. **Offered at \$899,000**



945 Mountain View Drive
Charm abounds in this 867 sf cutie on .20 ac lvl lot near all Lafayette Village conveniences. 1bd/1ba with exceptional curb appeal. Attn to detail thruout, Fr drs to gardens & decks. Sep artists studio. **Offered at \$480,000**



3376 Ridge Road
Affordable 4bd detached home in the popular Trail neighborhood surrounded by heritage oaks - truly a beautiful, natural setting. Tons of recent improvements made to this charming home. Walk to town/trail/schools. **Offered at \$649,000**



3363 St. Mary's Road
Quiet location set back from road. Classic 4bd/2.5ba rancher on nice lot. Near trail, Stanley Middle School and town. Private pool setting. **Offered at \$749,000**



3286 Sweet Drive
Lovely 3150 sf home, flexible floor plan, updated throughout, granite kitchen. Sweeping views, 2 master bedrooms plus 2 more bedrooms & 4 baths in Burton Valley. Guest set-up w/separate entry. **Offered at \$890,000**



1730 Toyon Road
Charming craftsman-styled 2100 sq. ft. home on secluded 3/4 acre. Newer roof, skylights, furnace -gorgeous huge new decks. Maple floors, Wolfe range, very private, very secluded. **Offered at \$925,000**



2950 Windtree Court
Lovely one-story 4bd/2.5ba traditional, beautiful flat lot on cul-de-sac. Tastefully remodeled. Close-in to trail, town, commute! Tremendous value! www.2950WindtreeCt.com. **Offered at \$990,000**



1847 Reliez Valley Road
Newly renovated w/high style & fully updated amenities & quality features. Lg new Chef's kitchen with adjoining fam rm & formal living/dining rms + stylish master suite. Lots of bedrooms, new baths. **Offered at \$1,095,000**



1258 Panorama
This one you've been waiting for! Charming trad ranch home on most coveted street in Lafayette! Updated thruout w/hdwd flooring, granite kitchen, fab lvl yd, ideal for entertaining & play. Walk to Happy Valley Elementary! **Offered at \$1,189,000**



855 Mountain View Drive
Sophisticated design comes together boldly with quality materials in this fully renovated 4bd/3ba home ready for holiday occupancy! Elegant yet comfortable, lovely tranquil setting with views. Pvt but conveniently close-in. **Offered at \$1,295,000**



8 Hawks Hill Court
Absolutely stunning pano views of Mt. Diablo, hills & Carquinez straits. Custom built in 2006 w/master suite, LR, DR, FR, kitchen on main level, 3 more bdms & 2nd fam rm downstairs. Wine room too! **Offered at \$1,458,000**

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