

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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