

Louder Retirement Should Not Unhinge Joint Venture

Fire chiefs say MOFD/ConFire station consolidation plan stays on course

By Nick Marnell

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District closed Lafayette's fire station 16 in January. This month ConFire chief Daryl Louder announced his retirement—raising fears that these events will compound the uncertainty of providing fire and emergency services to Lafayette, including concerns over a proposed inter-agency fire station consolidation plan.

Louder approached the Moraga-Orinda Fire District in January with a proposal for a joint venture: combine his shuttered station 16 with MOFD's station 43, which was scheduled for renovation. The resultant station 46 partnership is expected to save each district an estimated \$1 million annually in operating costs. The proposed site for the new station is along El Nido Ranch Road in Lafayette, near the Orinda border.

Louder will stay in the job until the end of October. "There are a number of strategic issues I plan to work on during my remaining time with the district," he said. "Obviously, the joint fire station initiative is centric to Lafayette."

"I do not see the chief's departure having an effect on Lafayette," said Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen, who was upbeat about the prospects of the consolidation. "The MOFD/ConFire talks are moving along quickly, and I know that Louder is committed to working diligently to see if we can make this joint station happen," she said.

MOFD Fire Chief Randall Bradley concurred. "We are very close to an agreement that we can bring to our boards," he said. "Louder's departure should not impact the discussions and our ability to finalize an agreement."

Not everybody exuded the same confidence. Vince Wells,

president of United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County Local 1230, was not sure how Louder's retirement will impact the consolidation proposal. "He is the biggest proponent of this plan from the ConFire side," said Wells. "His leaving will certainly impact his credibility and ability to convince the board of supervisors that the merger is a good deal when he will not be around to see the deal through. It leaves us without a fire chief at a very critical time."

Lafayette resident George Burt also bemoaned the timing of Louder's exit. "To make painful decisions, and then leave, is tough. If he could have stayed, we'd be better off, because he would have been here to implement the changes." Burt praised Louder for at least trying to do something positive. "Louder's going to get the blame for a lot of things, but I'll give him credit for coming to Bradley with the consolidation idea," he said.

Notwithstanding the question marks, the consolidation effort remains on track, and Louder is committed to seeing the plan through. "We have been meeting with county counsel and MOFD on a proposal we can present to the board of supervisors. I'm hoping that we can have something to present by late April," he said.

As to the plan for finding Louder's successor, Andersen said she was appreciative that Louder gave the board over six months notice that he would be leaving. "This gives us the opportunity to search for and find a replacement who will be up to the task of leading a fire agency with severe economic challenges, and who is open to innovative solutions to meet the fire and emergency medical response needs of our community," she said.



Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings
The Moraga-Orinda Fire District holds Board Meetings on the first and third Wednesday of every month at 7 p.m. Any exceptions will be posted in advance.

Next meeting: Regular Board Meeting, April 17, 2013, 7 p.m.
(Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

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SELLING THE LAMORINDA LIFESTYLE SINCE 1994

Special Delivery

MOFD attends to its first childbirth in 10 years

By Nick Marnell



Back row, from left: Engineer Paramedic Jon Ford, Firefighter Paramedic Stephen Gehling, Firefighter Paramedic Anthony Stephens, Firefighter Chris Mathews; front row: Sameer Rathod, holding Vivek, and Chandni Rathod; not pictured: Captain Sean McGee. Photo Tod Fierner

The dispatch into Moraga-Orinda Fire District Station 45 on the evening of January 13 alerted the company to a medical emergency. A woman was in labor and delivery was imminent.

Captain Sean McGee and his firefighter/paramedic unit dashed out of the station, heading for Stanton Avenue in Orinda. The crew arrived at the home in three minutes and rushed to the master bedroom, where Chandni Rathod was seconds away from giving birth to her first child.

"I've delivered four babies in the field," said lead paramedic Stephen Gehling. "This one was easy." The baby was already crowning, and at 10:17 p.m., after Gehling applied his training and experience in emergency childbirth, into his hands arrived a 5-pound, 15-ounce boy, Vivek.

"He was seven days early," said Rathod, recalling that she was in a fog throughout the delivery process. The father, Sameer Rathod, said that he remained calm but joked with firefighters, "If you guys were even a minute or two later..."

After the delivery, the MOFD crew drove the mother and baby to Alta Bates Summit Medical Center for follow-up care.

The Rathods and the firefighters met at Station 45 on April 1 for a reunion, and Fire Chief Randall Bradley presented an MOFD Birth Certificate to the family and an MOFD Live Birth Award to the delivery crew.

"This was one of the fun days of our job," said Bradley.

"And we are eternally grateful," said the new dad.

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