

# All in the Family

## New ConFire battalion chief in Lafayette

By Nick Marnell



New battalion chief Lou Manzo, in white shirt, near center, surrounded by 38 of his friends and family members, at the June 9 Contra Costa County Fire Protection District pinning ceremony. Photo provided

Between emergency calls and non-traditional work schedules, flexibility is a must when setting up an interview with a firefighter. With Lou Manzo, the interview was scheduled around a personal event that there was no chance he would miss.

"It's my kids' last day of school," said the father of three.

Manzo, recently promoted to battalion chief of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, jumped into his firefighting career after a nudge from a family member.

"I got a call from one of my close

cousins, in Denver," said Manzo. The cousin suggested that Manzo should give the fire service a try. The suggestion clicked; Manzo trained partly in his home town of Alameda and he was hired by ConFire in May 1990.

His new assignment, Battalion 1 Shift A, covers the city of Lafayette. Manzo described how he intends to carry out the heightened public outreach mission of ConFire chief Jeff Carman. "I plan on attending city council meetings with an engine company from Lafayette," he said, stressing that he will strive to maintain open and consistent communication.

He began with a message to Lafayette residents. "Keep and maintain the required distance of defensible space around your homes," said the new battalion chief. "It is extremely important for homeowners whose residences back up to the open space. With the current drought conditions and severely dry vegetation, this is going to be one of our busiest wildland seasons."

Manzo was formally pinned at the June 9 ConFire award ceremony. "I am impressed with his work as a battalion chief so far. I am already impressed with his family ethic by the large gathering that was at the meeting to support him," said Carman.

# Andersen Balks at Tax Increase

By Nick Marnell

Divided Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors approved a motion at its June 3 meeting to authorize conducting an opinion poll to determine if county residents will support a sales tax increase to help fund public safety programs in the county. The proposed one-quarter to one-half cent sales tax increase would raise revenue primarily for law enforcement and prosecution, fire and emergency medical service and health care.

"And libraries," added chair Karen Mitchoff, who stressed that the motion was to hire an outside consultant to conduct an opinion poll on the likely fate of the proposed sales tax, not to implement the tax itself.

"I do not want us to be the county with the highest sales tax," said Supervisor Candace Andersen, whose district includes Lamorinda. She said she favored local control for a sales tax, at the city level, not the county.

"And I don't see how it would benefit the citizens in District 2," she added.

The sales tax idea was proposed by Mitchoff and Supervisor John Gioia after the failure of a parcel tax in West County to cover the \$18 million annual deficit of Doctors Medical Center San Pablo. Andersen refused to support using sales tax proceeds to revive the facility. "The hospital continues to function in an unsustainable manner," she said. "We need to change the model and not just pour more money into it."

Many in the packed board chambers pleaded with the supervisors to pursue the tax, some stating that saving Doctors Medical Center is a way for the county to support the collective public good. An emergency room nurse from the hospital addressed Andersen.

"You'll be paying us to take care of the patients that you don't want to," she said.

"Somebody is going to have take care of those patients," said Darrell Lee, chair of the Contra Costa County Emergency Medical Care Committee, noting that the closure of Doctors

Medical Center will force the 40,000 people per year who went there to be transported to other area hospitals, putting additional pressure on the system. Lee, a division chief at the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, said that there would not likely be a direct impact on his district. "But there may be when we transport to our hospitals," he said.

"Because of the influx of the additional patients, turnaround times will be longer," explained Lee. "Patients may not be seen right away. Instead of the usual 15 to 20 minutes of waiting time at the hospital, it may become 30 to 45. Our ambulances will be out of service longer."

Jeff Carman, chief of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, agreed that his engines may be tied up for longer periods. Though ConFire does not transport patients to the hospital, a paramedic accompanies a critical patient in the American Medical Response ambulance, and if the ambulance has farther to travel, it takes the paramedic that much longer to get back to the engine. "AMR is pretty good about helping us get the medic back, but with the longer times and different destinations I am not sure how that will play out," said the chief.

AMR is working on a contingency plan in the event of a Doctors Medical Center shut down, according to Erik Rohde, AMR's Contra Costa County area general manager. Rohde said the closure will result in additional resources and personnel placed into service. "We will not allow this to adversely impact the services we provide to our community, including services provided in Lafayette," he said.

District 2 residents pay a significant amount in taxes which go to health, human services, workforce development and justice," said Andersen. "We don't have the same needs as other parts of the county and don't expect or demand to receive the same level of service. However, if my fellow supervisors are asking our residents to pay a new sales tax, there should be some benefit to us."

**Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings**

**Next meetings:**

**Next meeting: Wednesday, June 18 check website for updates**

(Go to [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org) as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

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