

Civic News Fire Districts

An Expectation of Inconvenience

By Nick Marnell

The mere mention of the word overtime in the context of the fire service can bring on arrhythmia. Management does not want to force overtime on its firefighters. In many cases the firefighters do not want to work so much overtime. The public has reacted with outrage over firefighter overtime pay. But overtime is a fact of firefighting life, and it has lately morphed from a nuisance to a near crisis.

“One of the first things I tell our recruits is to prepare to give up your evenings, weekends and holidays,” said Moraga-Orinda Fire District chief Stephen Healy. “And you’ll be missing a lot of birthdays and special family occasions. I advise them that this job has a built-in expectation of inconvenience, which includes working overtime.”

Both MOFD and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District use a constant staffing model, covering a week with three 56-hour shifts of three-person engine companies per fire station. All 56 hours are paid at regular time. (Additionally, ConFire employs three training captains and MOFD staffs its own ambulances.) ConFire has 26 vacancies for its 210 positions while MOFD is two short of a complete staff of 57. Filling those open slots and absences requires overtime. In fiscal year 2013-14, ConFire paid \$9.5 million in overtime; MOFD, \$1.5 million.

“You don’t down-staff to cover vacancies,” said Vince Wells, Local 1230 president. “But I get concerned when overtime is so excessive that the firefighters don’t want to work and you’re forcing them to.” And they are forced to, though they may trade off their shifts. Turning down mandatory overtime outright is a refusal of a direct order and is subject to disciplinary action.

ConFire chief Jeff Carman is also concerned that his firefighters are working excessive mandatory overtime. “They’re sometimes working 120 consecutive hours in order to keep our companies in service,” he said. “I worry about a wrong decision or an injury.”

Some fire districts carry extra people on the books for fill-in, but that business model is more expensive. “It’s 26 percent cheaper to pay overtime than to add personnel,”

said Carman, though the district has just completed a training academy and has scheduled one more this fall to help fill vacancies. Healy said that the payroll percentage saved by paying overtime is similar in his district.

“I’d much rather the districts hire more firefighters,” said Wells, who noted that in the East Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, the firefighters have had enough. “Because of the demands of excessive overtime, the district is closing a station. The situation was jeopardizing the health and safety of the firefighters.”

Both Lamorinda fire agencies maintain a list of personnel available to work voluntary overtime, but the ConFire list is not long enough to fill the vacancies.

“I’m thinking I’m getting off at 8 (a.m.), but I get a notice of a mandatory and I’m not going anywhere,” said ConFire captain Maurice Howell. “That’s because only 18 guys signed up for 27 openings. There’s no one to relieve you.”

Howell said he was warned early in his career about the overtime trap. “I’ve been mando’d on my kid’s birthday,” said the Lafayette resident. “But to me, the biggest thing? The family dinners missed.” He said it is a challenge to spend quality time at home. “The wife acts as a single parent. I try to parent by phone, but it’s not the same. I try to make the most of my days off with the family, but my wife has a routine of her own. I come home, and I disrupt it.”

“It takes a strong spouse,” added MOFD captain Tony Perry. “The spouse is part of the process. I will tell you, this job is affecting a new relationship I’m in.”

Second jobs are no longer as prevalent among firefighters. “This is my second job,” said Howell, who worked more than 3,600 hours in 2013. After their July pay cut, many MOFD firefighters count on the overtime. “I’m one of the highest paid firefighters in the district, and I still need the overtime,” said Perry. “We’re grateful to have it.”

“But to go home to our families after a shift, that’s what it’s all about,” said Howell. “The money doesn’t hurt, but there’s nothing like sleeping at home.”



Curran & Woolsey Real Estate Team

Just Listed!

Stunning Traditional Rancher on Premium Lot



1336 Reliez Valley Road, Lafayette

Offered at \$1,825,000

Lovely sprawling 4 bedroom, 3.5 bath, 3676± sq. ft. located on .58± acre. Gourmet kitchen, open floor plan, expansive private level yard with beautiful gardens. Close proximity to downtown Lafayette. California living at its best!

www.1336ReliezValleyRd.com



Christine Curran & Lauren Woolsey

925.285.5336 | 925.899.9837

Lic.#01079009 | Lic.#01940797

www.atHomeInLamorinda.com



Memento Care Homes

Senior Assisted Living that Feels Like Family

Contact us today! (925) 954-4572



Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors Meetings

Next meeting:
Wednesday, Sept. 17
 check website for updates
 (Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information)

Contra Costa Board of Supervisors Meetings

Next meeting:
TBA
 Board Chamber room 107, Administration Building, 651 Pine St. Martinez
 (Agenda at http://ca-contra-costa-county2.civicplus.com/4664/Board-Meeting-Agendas-and-Videos)

Letters to the Editor
 ... continued

Editor:

The 2014 election for city council is the most important city council election since Orinda became an incorporated city 30 years ago. Orinda was such a great place to live then. Residents did not have to worry that our city government would pass regulations that would destroy our semi-rural environment. Now, we have Monteverde towering over North Orinda because our building height limits were ignored by the current City Council. What's next? Increased high-density development is taking hold with our current City Council members, affecting every aspect of our community.

Ask yourself: Is living in Orinda better or worse than four, eight, or 10 years ago? For the city's residents, a more appealing Orinda is vital. Eve Phillips and Linda Delehunt, both candidates for the Orinda City Council in 2014, will help assure that Orinda -- again -- becomes a great place to live. They will support what the people want, not the interests of big development.

Orinda needs new leadership.

Ms. Phillips and Ms. Delehunt, if elected to the city council, will protect the quality of Orinda's schools, help end the intolerable parking and traffic conditions that bedevil the downtown area, protect residents' views of the scenic hills, fix the roads, and enforce Orinda's 35-foot height limit for buildings.

When casting your ballot for city council, please vote for Eve Phillips and Linda Delehunt. The city you protect will be your own.

Sandra Wooten
 Orinda

Saturday, September 20th 10-7 PM Sunday, September 21st 10-6 PM
 Downtown Lafayette

19th Annual Lafayette Art Wine Music festival
 september 20 & 21

- FREE**
- Admission
 - Parking at BART
 - Shuttle to event
 - Bike Valet Parking



4 LIVE STAGES -- 2 FULL DAYS

- THE SUN KINGS • FOREVERLAND • AJA VU • PETTY THEFT •
- STEALIN' CHICAGO • ZEBOP • THE SPAZMATICS • THE BIG JANGLE •
- EAST BAY MUDD • NIGHT MOVES • BAY BRIDGE BEAT • DUO GADJO •
- OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY • JUICE • BOB ATHAYDE & FRIENDS •
- ACOUSTIC S&M • JUKE JOINT • RED HOUSE ALL STARS • DOMINANT 7 •

Presenting Sponsor: SUNGEVITY GENERATE POSITIVE, xfinity, REPUBLIC SERVICES, LAMORINDA SUN CONTRA-COSTA TIMES, Central Self-Storage, USAA PAYING, BART, Champlin, Celebrity X Cruises, DINO LUNGO, Festival Sponsor: BMW, Bank of America, Bank of West, Whole Foods, EBMUD, diablo, Lamorinda Web, Lamorinda Web connecting our community, NBC BAY AREA, Lamorinda, LAMORINDA WEEKLY, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, Alta Bates Summit Medical Center, A Sutter Health Affiliate, MUSEUM FROM LAFAYETTE

www.lafayettefestival.com
 www.facebook.com/lafayettefestival @friendly chamber #LafFest