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Photo Robin Fox

Santa Claus Came to Town

With Christmas right around the corner, the man in red made a special early visit to spread some holiday cheer in Lafayette and received a rock star welcome from little ones. Rolling up in the town's vintage fire truck, Old Betsy, the bearded one proceeded with an entourage of giddy children to his temporary house, complete with big chair, in Plaza Park.

Bedford Falls has nothing on Lafayette. The fake town in the movie that shares the same name as the recent event, "It's

a Wonderful Life in Lafayette" couldn't compare to actual children and real goodies, music, and a display of holiday wishes written by second graders, along with words of wisdom from the mayor.

Excitement and a bit of precipitation were in the air. Jodie Burciaga arrived early with her three kids while it was still dry – they were first in line to take a photo with Santa. Burciaga was hoping to get a picture suitable for Christmas cards. Uniformed Boy Scouts shepherded visitors toward Santa. Just

across the grass was a stage set up with school-age singers. Lafayette Nursery School kids were the first group on the agenda, singing "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Throw in a sparkling tree lighting, food trucks, happy hour beverages for sale to the grown-ups, along with an activity house, it all adds up to the authentic wonderful life we share in Lafayette. In the film, angel in training Clarence says to Jimmy Stewart, "Strange isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" - C. Tyson

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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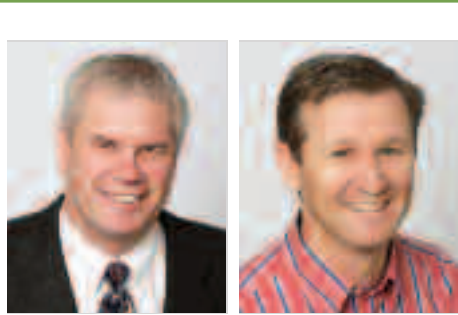
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A Note About Our Newspaper Carrier

Blackhawk Enterprise (email – mailblackhawk@gmail.com) has been delivering the Lamorinda Weekly to all homes in Orinda, Lafayette and Moraga since January 2011. The team of eight drivers works hard to make sure you get your newspaper every other Wednesday. Blackhawk Enterprise and its team members would like to wish our readers a joyous holiday season and a very happy new year. You will also see a flyer from them in this week's issue.

Thank you,
Lamorinda Weekly



The Bernie & Ryerson Team

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To the State Finals!

Read story on page C2.



Photo Gint Federas

Life in Lamorinda

B1-B12

Meditation circle expands in Moraga - page B2.




Our Homes

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Lafayette

Public Meetings

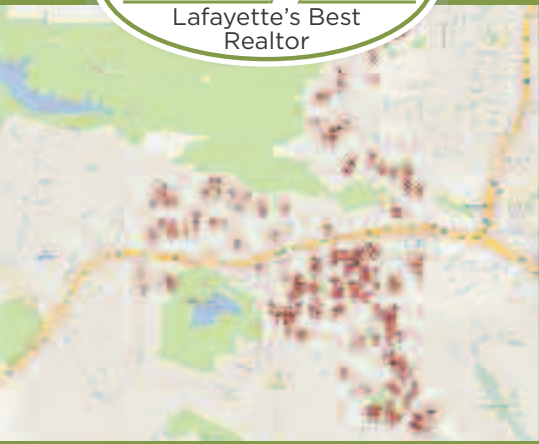
City Council
Monday, Jan. 12, 7 p.m.
Lafayette Library & Learning Center,
Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Planning Commission
Monday, Jan. 5, 7 p.m.
Lafayette Library & Learning Center,
Community Hall, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

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Design Review
Monday, Dec. 22, canceled
Lafayette Library & Learning Center,
Arts & Science Discovery Center,
3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

School Board Meetings

Acalanes Union High School District
Wednesday, Jan. 14, 7:30 p.m.
AUHSD Board Room
1212 Pleasant Hill Road, Lafayette
www.acalanes.k12.ca.us

Lafayette School District
Wednesday, Jan. 14, 7 p.m.
Regular Board Meeting
Stanley Library
3477 School St., Lafayette
www.lafsd.k12.ca.us

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements
City of Lafayette:
www.ci.lafayette.ca.us
Phone: (925) 284-1968
Chamber of Commerce:
www.lafayettechamber.org



Lafayette Police Department Incident Summary Report, Nov. 30-Dec. 6

Alarms	52
911 Calls	30
Battery	
St Mary's Rd/Moraga Rd	
Burglary, Auto	
Springhill Elementary	
1000 block Blackwood Ln	
30 block Crest Rd	
10 block Crest Rd	
Defrauding an Innkeeper	
reported to LPD	
Hit & Run	
3500 block Mt Diablo Bl	
Petty Theft	
Quandt Rd	
10 block Charles Ct	
3600 block Bickerstaff St	
10 block W Arbor Wy	
3500 block Mt Diablo Bl	
Loud Party	
Glen Rd/Thompson Rd	
Panhandling	
CVS	(2)
Public Nuisance	
800 block Mt View Dr	(2)
900 block Reliez Station Rd	
900 block East St	
3500 block Mt Diablo Bl	
Suspicious	
Circumstances	5
Vehicle	10
Subject	4
Traffic Stops	20
Traffic Hazards	9
Trespassing	
3400 block Golden Gate Wy	(2)
Threats	
3700 block Mt Diablo Bl	
Vandalism	
1000 block Stuart St	
Vehicle Theft	
2nd Street/Mt Diablo Bl	
900 block Moraga Rd	

Lafayette Bans Plastic Bags and Styrofoam

By Cathy Tyson
Soon the familiar options of "plastic or paper" will be heard no more in Lafayette. The City Council formally adopted new rules Dec. 8 to ban single-use plastic shopping bags at 16 local establishments. The ban will take effect on July 1 and will impose a 10-cent charge for paper bags, impacting mainly large grocery stores and pharmacies. The approval goes one step further than SB 270, the statewide regulation, by also banning Styrofoam from use at food establishments. Municipalities had the option to customize their own new rules if enacted before the Jan. 1 deadline imposed by the state.

Supporters call it reducing two costly, environmentally damaging and easily preventable sources of litter and pollution. Board members of Sustainable Lafayette applauded the decision to draft a local plastic bag ordinance similar to those created by Walnut Creek and other communities. The group supports the 10-cent charge for paper bags, saying it is

"vital to the success and effectiveness of the ordinance." They feel it provides an incentive to embrace reusable shopping bags, creates consistency with neighboring communities, and doesn't switch issues - fixing one problem, plastic pollution; but creating another problem - the environmental impact from paper bags.

Recycled paper bags will be the new normal, although the newly adopted ordinance requires stores to charge customers a 10-cent fee for each paper bag, with the revenue collected going to the store - not to the government. This will affect businesses in Lafayette including grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores, convenience stores and Chow. Of course, shoppers who bring their own re-usable cloth bags, the most environmentally savvy solution, can save a dime.

The change creates a dilemma at Diablo Foods, which long ago switched to environmentally friendly recycled paper bags and sparingly

uses plastic bags made from more expensive recycled materials. They incentivize shoppers with a 10-cent credit per bag for those who bring their own. Manager David Collier explained that the store would prefer to continue to use complimentary paper bags, but the new rules will force them to charge customers the 10-cent fee starting in July. He estimates that roughly half of Diablo Foods' customers already bring in cloth bags for their purchases.

While some people recycle their single-use plastic bags, the majority, approximately 88 percent according to a study by the Environmental Protection Agency, don't get recycled.

The new rules dovetail with the city's environmental strategy that includes a goal of diverting 75 percent of solid waste from landfill. After monitoring plastic bag use, the Environmental Task Force recommended that this move would: reduce litter, which can end up in creeks and storm drain systems, limit negative impact

on wildlife, and diminish use of fossil fuels.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed the nation's first statewide ban on single-use plastic bags, SB270, on Sept. 30. At the time he said, "This bill is a step in the right direction - it reduces the torrent of plastic polluting our beaches, parks and even the vast ocean itself. We're the first to ban these bags, and we won't be the last."

Styrofoam, the second component of Lafayette's new ordinance, is the brand name and registered trademark for extruded polystyrene foam manufactured by Dow Chemical Company. The EPA and the International Agency for Research on Cancer have determined styrene as a possible human carcinogen. Polystyrene food packaging is a double whammy - it's not recyclable and chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, are used in the manufacturing process. There is evidence that CFCs, when discharged into the atmosphere, degrade the earth's ozone layer.

City Finances Look Healthy

By Cathy Tyson
"The city remains in good fiscal position," said Jennifer Wakeman, Lafayette's new financial services manager, during her audit presentation covering fiscal year 2013-14 at the Dec. 8 city council meeting. On the next agenda item, adopting the fiscal year 2014-15 municipal budget, administrative services director Tracy Robinson went a little further. "We ended the year in a very strong position," she said, referring to the updated final budget. "The five-year forecast looks very good," she added.

The actual financials, in a riveting 110 page report, show the best of both worlds: expenditures were \$1.1 million below budget and revenue was \$800,000 above budget for fiscal year 2013-14. In addition, the city's end of year reserves, or savings, is projected to be \$7 million, the equivalent to 56 percent of General Fund expenditures. That amount is exclusive of the roughly \$2 million invested in the old library property which may be sold in the future.

Also bolstering the financial outlook is an additional \$400,000 in impact fees, starting in fiscal year 2015-16, on top of the current \$400,000 annual contribution, for a total of \$800,000 paid by the Solid Waste Authority that will go toward repairing the damage caused by garbage trucks, allowing fully funded road repairs without depleting reserves in the near future.

Where is this money coming from? "The property tax base remains stable," said City Manager Steven Falk in his official "Management's Discussion and Analysis of the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2014." Property tax and assessments are the largest

revenue source for Lafayette. "Assessed values in the city increased 6 percent" over the prior year, said Falk. For those still in sticker shock after paying property taxes, it's important to note that the City of Lafayette only receives 6.18 percent of property taxes paid by homeowners.

He also pointed out that there was an increase in sales tax of 3 percent, transient lodging tax (thank you

Lafayette Park Hotel) was 12 percent higher than last year, and there were increases in motor vehicle in-lieu tax and planning, permits and fee revenue.

Cropper Accountancy Corporation issued an understated "clean" opinion of the city's financial statements, in their annual audit.

Contributing to the robust municipal financial picture is the lack of unfunded liability for retirement

benefits. The 38 full-time city employees, unlike most public sector organizations, do not participate in a defined benefit retirement program. Rather, city employees have traditional defined contribution programs, 401 and 457 plans, according to Falk, and the city has a fully funded retiree medical program. ... continued on page A11

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- Clocks, Etc.
- Diablo Foods
- Douglass Designs Products and Showroom
- El Charro Mexican Dining
- Elmwood Stationary
- Floret
- Gem Lust
- Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery
- La Finestra Ristorante
- Lafayette Pet Shoppe
- Lafayette Physical Therapy
- Lamorinda Music
- Lamorinda Theatre Academy
- Lily Dong Photography
- Mangia! Ristorante & Pizzeria
- Minuteman Press
- Rustic Tavern
- Sharp Bicycle
- Specialtees
- Sugi Fine Bedding & Gifts,
- Susan Foord Catering & Café
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Mayor Don Tatzin Shifts Positions

By Cathy Tyson



Council Member Don Tatzin with wife Ellen Reintjes. Photo C. Tyson

County Supervisor Candace Andersen came to pay tribute, thanking Tatzin for his amusing sense of humor and dry wit, bringing levity to lengthy and at times dry meetings they attend about fire service and transportation, and pointing out that he has "chosen to commit his life to public service. I admire that."

Newly elected State Assembly Member Catharine Baker commended Tatzin for his service and working toward consensus on the city council, minimizing rancor. "I hope I can take that example to Sacramento," she said.

As is the custom, now former mayor Tatzin reflected on the challenges of the prior year with family and friends in the audience, thanking wife Ellen for her consistent support as delicious, celebratory chocolate cake waited in the wings.

Decisions were made on two city-owned properties in 2014. It was decided that the old library will be used for a public purpose, and that the parcel across the street will be used, at least for the time being, for public parking.

... continued on page A11

Now starting his astonishing 30th year serving the people of Lafayette, Don Tatzin gracefully wrapped up his sixth mayoral term and reflected on accomplishments of the past year.

The last city council meeting of 2014 is the designated time when members rotate positions, so going forward Mayor Tatzin becomes Council Member Tatzin, and 2014's vice mayor, Brandt Andersson, will be Lafayette's mayor in 2015. Traci Reilly moves from council member to vice mayor.

Welcome to Lafayette



Photo C. Tyson

Drivers descending the off-ramps at Acalanes Road and at the Central Lafayette exit off of Highway 24 will notice the new modern signage that recently replaced the older deteriorating plywood signs, which had definitely seen better days. Local architect Ken Hertel, who sits on the city's Design Review Commission, donated his time to craft what he calls a clean, rustic contemporary style. The west end sign is solar powered with high efficiency

LED lights. Look for low maintenance landscaping to be installed in the corten steel planters in the coming months. Hertel credits City Manager Steven Falk for seizing an opportunity to bring these signs from the 1970s into the "new millennium." Semirural, the ubiquitous term endlessly debated in town, is, like beauty, surely in the eye of the beholder – but the natural elements of stone, distressed wood, and soon-to-arrive landscaping do make a statement. - C. Tyson

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ALAIN PINEL



Moraga

Public Meetings

Town Council

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 7 p.m.
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School,
1010 Camino Pablo

Planning Commission

Monday, Jan. 5, 6 p.m.
Hacienda De las Flores, La Sala,
2100 Donald Dr.

Design Review

Monday, Jan. 12, 7 p.m.
Moraga Library, 1500 St. Mary's Rd.

School Board Meeting

Moraga School District
Tuesday, Jan. 13, 7:30 p.m.
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate
School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
www.moraga.k12.ca.us
See also AUHSD meeting page A2

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements

Town of Moraga:

www.moraga.ca.us
Phone: (925) 888-7022

Chamber of Commerce:

www.moragachamber.org

Moraga Citizens' Network:

www.moragacitizensnetwork.org



Moraga Police Department

Pot in purse, 12/04/14 The HomeGoods store reported that a female suspect walked into the store carrying a large purse which appeared empty. The suspect then started walking around the store and made her way to the kitchen department. She picked up a large pot worth \$149.99 and was observed putting the pot in her purse, then exiting the store without paying for the pot. She was placed under citizen's arrest by store staff. Perhaps medical marijuana would have been a better option?

Stolen identity, 12/04/14 Over the past two months, an unknown suspect has unlawfully withdrawn approximately \$6,300 from a Longfield Place resident's checking account. The incident started when the victim received an unsolicited phone call from someone claiming to be from Microsoft. She then answered a series of questions and provided her bank account number to the caller. Red flag! She became suspicious when she noticed unauthorized charges on her account. It appears that all of the transactions were conducted via the Internet. The Moraga resident has since purchased a new computer and closed the compromised bank account.

D.U.I. 12/06/14 A red Mustang was pulled over at 2 a.m. near the entrance to Saint Mary's College for unsafe speed. Cops noticed the suspicious smell of alcohol on the driver, who happened to be 18 years old, clearly too young to be legally drinking. He was placed under arrest and submitted to a breath test which showed 14 percent blood alcohol level.

Missing wallet, 12/06/14 A woman was shopping on Center Street and placed her wallet next to her 4-year-old son who was sitting in a shopping cart. She left the cart briefly while she looked for an item. Unfortunately, it wasn't until she was ready to check out that she realized the wallet was gone. Credit cards, gift cards, driver's license and a blank check were in the wallet. Sounds like a Grinch stole Christmas.

Another missing wallet, 12/06/14 A woman was shopping at HomeGoods in the afternoon when she noticed her wallet was missing from her purse.

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Park Street Residences

New development proposed for lot next to Rheem Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Rendering of the townhome option proposed for Park Street Residences.

Image provided

Applicant and architect Jerry Loving presented the Moraga Planning Commission with a plan for an infill development on the vacant 3-acre property next to the Rheem Theatre. The Dec. 1 meeting was a study session requested by the developer to get initial feedback and suggestions from the planning commissioners. Loving will incorporate their comments into a revised concept that he will bring to the commission early next year.

The lot is located on Park Street, which runs parallel to Rheem Boulevard and is separated from the well-traveled road by a row of mature trees. The space currently serves as an overflow parking area during popular theater events, such as the California Independent Film Festival.

Loving proposed two possible concepts, both at rather high density and designed in a Spanish style: a 30-unit single-family townhome project, or a 40-unit condominium project.

Both plans would maintain the hillside. "The hill is stable but needs to be fixed," commented Loving after the meeting. "We had a study done, and we'll add drainage up on the hill. We'll make it stronger and better," he said. Nearly one-third of the area would be preserved as open space. "We will be able to preserve the sycamore trees," added Loving, who is the founder and now CEO-emeritus of award-winning LCA Architects in Walnut Creek, a firm with a long and diverse creative

history. "There will be great improvements to the site, and the benefit of having an architect as a developer is that we include creativity and aesthetics in the concept from the start."

There was no consensus as to which option commissioners liked best. They highlighted some elements that they found appealing, such as elevators for the apartments, and criticized others, such as tandem parking lots.

"This new development would be for older folks wanting to downsize, but also for young professionals," said Loving. The proposed three-story townhomes have three bedrooms and range from 2,197 to 2,528 square feet. They would be attached as eight groups of three or four units each, 35 feet high, and each unit would have a private patio. The condominium alternative proposes two 20-unit buildings. This option also has three levels, with the ground floor being mostly for parking – an elevator would go to the upper floors. The two-bedroom condominiums would range in size from 1,163 to 1,871 square feet.

"It was a fine study session with good feedback," said Loving. "The commissioners took it thoughtfully, and made good suggestions." He plans to return to the commission, on a date not yet set, with a redesigned project that is likely to combine both concepts.

Moraga's New Council Member – Teresa Onoda

By Sophie Braccini

The November election brought a new member to the Moraga Town Council – former planning commissioner Teresa Onoda. Passionate about plain air and open space, Onoda brings a fresh outlook to the town's affairs.

At her first council meeting on Dec. 10, Onoda stated that she believes she was elected because Moragans want a council that listens to their concerns and shares their priorities. She added that people told her they care deeply about the town's natural beauty, its great schools and the quality of life. "They made clear that they are concerned about developments that detract from the views of the ridgelines, and on the impact a growing population will have on traffic and schools," she said. "They also said they want a more vibrant retail and more recreational opportunities. They said they hope the town and Saint Mary's would build a stronger

partnership." Onoda took notes of what people said and she pledged to do her best to help the town address those challenges while preserving our current lifestyle.

Onoda was born, and grew up, in Des Moines, Iowa; she attended

Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., where she earned a degree in fine arts. She then decided to teach. "My teaching career encompassed art instruction from kindergarten in the Omaha public school system all the way up to adult workshops affiliated

with the Des Moines Art Center and workshops for accomplished painters," she said. "I have taught all grades in between, not only in Omaha but in Houston, Texas; Memphis, Tenn.; and in local Moraga schools." ... continued on page A12



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New School Board Hits the Ground Running

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Bruce Burns, Jim Obsitnik, Parker Colvin, Shari Simon, Jon Nickens, Heather O'Donnell Photo Andy Scheck



Heather O'Donnell



Jon Nickens



Jim Obsitnik Photos S. Braccini

A new school board took its place on the Moraga School District dais for the first time Dec. 9. Three of the five board members are brand new to the job – Heather O'Donnell, Jon Nickens and Jim Obsitnik; the other two, board president Shari Simon and vice president Parker Colvin, have been on the board for only two years. The previous board had members who served for many terms; most of their children had long since left Moraga schools. All of those on the new board have children currently enrolled in the district, some still in elementary school. The newcomers share an interest in bringing more technology to the classroom; but like their predecessors, they value and respect the school district.

Their first agenda was not light. The three new members dove into the thick of things with a budget presentation, including a two-year projection that includes the rising cost of pensions; a summary of the dis-

trict's goals and policies; and the anticipation of the coming bargaining process with the unions. The new members asked pointed questions, showing that the matters at hand were not foreign to them.

They all have significant experience in the district. O'Donnell, whose third child is in seventh grade at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, has been a PTA president and very active in the schools for the past 10 years; Nickens was on the board of the Moraga Education Foundation, the Rheem Elementary School Site Council, and has volunteered in classrooms. Obsitnik served on the Moraga Planning Commission for several years; he, too, volunteered at Rheem Elementary. He and his wife, Anna, were very involved with the school district in the aftermath of the Kristen Cunnane case, as they worked with the superintendent to make sure that the safety of students is at the forefront of the district's priorities.

... continued on page A11

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Orinda

Public Meetings

City Council

Tuesday, Jan. 13, 7 p.m.
Auditorium, Orinda Library,
26 Orinda Way

Planning Commission

TBA
Auditorium, Orinda Library,
26 Orinda Way

School Board Meeting

Orinda Union School District

TBA
OUSD Office, 8 Altarinda Road,
www.orindaschools.org
See also AUHSD meeting page A2

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements

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Chamber of Commerce:

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The Orinda Association:

www.orindaassociation.org



Orinda Police Department Incident Summary Report, Nov. 30-Dec. 6

Alarms	31
Burglary, Auto	
Orinda Theatre	
911 Calls	2
Civil Disturbance	
10 block Lost Valley Dr	
Disturbance	
Wilder/Hwy 24	
Nations	
30 block Rio Vista	
Don Gabriel Wy/La Cresta Rd	
Forgery	
Police report	
Hit & Run	
100 block Crestview Dr	
Intoxicated	
500 block Moraga Wy	
Loud Party	
Don Gabriel Wy/La Cresta Rd	
60 block La Cresta Rd	
Theft, Petty	
Safeway (2)	
100 block Cannon Dr	
Panhandling	
Safeway	
Reckless Driving	
10 block Vashell Wy	
Rheem Blvd./Glorietta Blvd	
Suspicious	
Person	5
Circumstances	2
Vehicle	4
Threats	
100 block Orchard Rd	
Traffic Stops	45



Maureen Wilbur

Happy Holidays to all and a Healthy and Prosperous 2015!
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Orinda Housing Element Draft Headed to State for Initial Review

By Laurie Snyder

"I'm happy sending all the sites to HCD and pushing out the decision until we have a final EIR," said Orinda City Councilmember Dean Orr as the council's Dec. 9 meeting wound down. The 10th such public meeting that the city has held since June regarding revisions it is required by state law to make to the Housing Element of its General Plan, it was another lengthy affair.

City planning director Emmanuel Ursu again recapped the history of the recent update process, explaining that, after extensive pub-

lic input, three possible alternatives for rezoning land to allow for potential new housing development were selected for analysis in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The ball fields at 40 Santa Maria Way (alternative one) could allow for 64 to 80 potential units of housing, a combination of lands used currently by three churches for parking (alternative two) could allow for up to 80 units, or a combination of the land currently used by the Orinda Community Church for its upper parking lot at 10 Irwin Way plus land used

by businesses at 1 Orinda Way and 27 Orinda Way (alternative three) could allow for 80 units.

Or not. Because the state's shortfall provisions applied to the Housing Element adopted last year no longer apply, the city is now allowed to reduce the number of units that can be accommodated at the default density from 80 to 48. Plus, the city's role continues "to be limited to identifying sites and establishing zoning" that allows owners to develop housing. "Whether or not to develop the properties is entirely up

to the property owners to decide. That is not a decision of the city. The city's role is to establish the rules for development, and then to review development proposals – if they are submitted – for consistency with the rules that have been established."

In response to a question posed by Mayor Steve Glazer regarding whether or not the city could submit its Housing Element draft to the state without selecting a specific candidate for rezoning, Ursu said yes. ... continued on page A11

For the Good of the City 2014 Mayor's Awards for Excellence

By Laurie Snyder

"I started out this year calling it a year of teamwork and collaboration, and so here as we end the year, I would like to highlight in my Awards for Excellence those people who have exemplified that ideal of working together as a team and also being very collaborative." With those words, Sue Severson began her final major action as mayor of the City of Orinda – presenting the annual Orinda Mayor's Awards for Excellence and presiding over the For the Good of the City segment of the Orinda City Council meeting Dec. 2.

Lauding the value of volunteerism, Severson presented the first award of the evening to Dennis Faye. "He's been a member of the Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Commission since its very inception in 2007," she observed of the former CIOC chair who was traveling and unable to accept the award in person. "He's played a pivotal role in the roads repair ballot measures." Severson also chose to honor the spirit of collaboration with the following awards, as captured by *Lamorinda Weekly* photographer Ohlen Alexander:



Mayor's 2014 Awards for Architectural Excellence: Choosing to honor two of Orinda's newest neighborhoods, Severson thanked the developers of the Wilder and Oak Grove subdivisions "because of the many enhancements that they have done," including the newest ball fields, parks and trails in Orinda. "Every night, I see hundreds of kids under the lights, playing and participating on those fields, and it makes me very proud – not only for the project – but for its involvement in the community," said Scott Goldie as he accepted the award on behalf of Wilder. Dan Carroll accepted the Oak Grove award on behalf of Pulte Homes.



"We are so pleased that you've chosen to honor the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe tonight when, truly, we wish to honor you, Sue, for all the support and encouragement you have given to us," said former Orinda mayor Bobbie Landers in accepting the **Mayor's 2014 Award for Architectural Preservation** for FJMA's efforts to save the historic adobe structure near Del Rey Elementary School. "From the very first organizational meeting at my home, you were there with enthusiastic words. We are still blossoming and bringing the towns of Moraga and Lafayette to join Orinda in recognizing the importance of embracing our past as well as moving forward to our future. Someday, we look forward to you being at the ribbon cutting to the Joaquin Moraga Adobe Learning Center and Museum."



"It's so fun for me to be here this evening to introduce to you the 13th student that the Orinda-Tabor Sister Cities Foundation has brought to Orinda from Tabor in the Czech Republic to study at our outstanding Miramonte High School," said Bobbie Landers as she described how visiting students are chosen for the competitive program during the For the Good of the City portion of the meeting. "Each year, I believe, we can't have a better student than we had in previous years, and each year, again, they prove to be terrific." Landers then introduced the 2014 visiting student, Marek Fencel, who thanked the community in a brief address before receiving a city pin from Severson.

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Orinda Thanks Severson for Years of Leadership

By Laurie Snyder



"This is our one last picture," said Steve Glazer as he gathered council members together to honor 2014 Orinda mayor and retiring City Council member Sue Severson. From left: Steve Glazer, Amy Worth, Sue Severson, Victoria Smith and Dean Orr
Photo Ohlen Alexander

"Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Orinda City Council does hereby recognize Sue Severson for her service on the Orinda City Council for the past 8 years. Be it further resolved that the city council honors Sue Severson for her service as 2014 mayor of Orinda, and thanks her for her timeless commitment and dedication to the citizens of Orinda."

Ask not what your country can do for you" was the driver behind the distribution of awards for excellence, the emergence of a future Czech civic leader, and the recognition of a woman who has championed

everything from Orinda's schools to the city's beautification to its regionally beloved Fourth of July Parade as Orindans came together to honor the achievements of their own Dec. 2. In a night filled with heartening moments, the most inspiring came for many during the recognition of long-time civic leader Sue Severson.

"Sue's extraordinary work, selfless dedication and generosity have touched every area of Orinda life, including the schools, parks, civic activities, the arts, recreation, and numerous charities," said Orinda City Council Member Dean Orr, one of

Severson's colleagues who took turns reading from a proclamation with "Whereas" sections so numerous that the formal reading was abridged.

Vice mayor Steve Glazer spoke of Severson's creation of the Orinda Community Foundation to meet the growing funding needs of Orinda's nonprofit organizations, and credited her with spearheading "the successful plan to fix Orinda's roads, minimizing auto repair expenses in Orinda for years to come." Council Member Victoria Smith cited Severson's creation of the Everyday Heroes Golf Tournament, the Orinda Kids' Triathlon, and the community-wide cleanup event, Orinda Action Day, as well as Severson's efforts "to improve transparency and community access to the inner workings of local government by hosting a series of brown bag lunches that included tours of city facilities and city departments."

Council Member Amy Worth added further texture, recalling her work with Severson and others 20 years ago on the Orinda school facilities bond campaign. "I'll tell you there was not a more incredibly devoted school board member than any-

body could ever ask for in terms of helping us lead that effort to restore and improve the Orinda schools.

And that's the kind of person Sue is. She takes any job that's handed to her and is heads and shoulders above all the rest of us - does such an amazing job, including so many people in the work that you do."

Local nonprofit leaders and residents also rose to praise Severson, and Glazer led a slide presentation with photographic highlights of the retiring mayor's career before turning over the podium to her one final time.

"We have much to celebrate this evening," said Severson as she began her remarks. "Orinda's been ranked as the second most friendly city in America; it's also in the top 10 best cities for young families in northern California, and also among the safest cities in California." She applauded the city's history of fiscal prudence, and praised council and staff for steering a smooth course even as Orinda recovered from several rain-induced emergencies over the years. She also praised the coming together of Orindans to pass June, 2014's \$20 million bond initiative, Measure J. "Com-

bined with Measure L - the sales tax, and our city's annual repair dollars and also, fortunately, a few grants, we will provide a record over \$8 million in infrastructure improvements this next year. No small task that we've long strived for."

Severson also cited the impact made by improved communications tools, including the live streaming of council meetings. "As I retire from the city council, I will miss the camaraderie of the council," she said, "but certainly not a calendar filled with meetings. It's time for this grandma to say goodbye to politics, and hello to longer vacations with my husband, Ralph, and enjoying many more frequent hugs from my grandchildren."

Following a standing ovation for Severson by the sizeable crowd, city clerk Michele Olsen administered the Oath of Office to the three Orindans elected in November to four-year council terms - newcomer Eve Phillips, Worth and Orr. Glazer and Smith were then unanimously chosen by the council to serve, respectively, as mayor and vice mayor for 2015.

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Fire Districts

Public Meetings

MOFD Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors
 Wednesday, Dec. 17, 7 p.m.
 Go to www.mofd.org as the meeting date approaches for location and more information

ConFire Board of Directors
 Wednesday, Jan. 13, 7 p.m.
 Board Chamber room 107, Administration Building, 651 Pine St., Martinez (Agenda at

Emergency response information and training:
 Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
www.lamorindacert.org

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ConFire to Upgrade One-Third of its Fleet

By Nick Marnell

Fire chiefs know all about timing. Their jobs revolve around - and their performance is gauged by - improving the incident response times in their districts or departments.

Exhibiting this knack for timing, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Chief Jeff Carman asked that his board approve a \$1 million annual lease-purchase payment for new fire apparatus, subsequently requesting adoption of an ordinance that will allow ConFire to charge \$1 million annually in first responder fees. The Board of Supervisors, acting as the ConFire board of directors, unanimously approved both requests at its Dec. 9 meeting.

ConFire will purchase nine fire engines, three aerial ladder trucks and one rescue truck from Pierce Manufacturing Inc. in 2015 under a 10-year lease-purchase agreement through Oshkosh Capital. "This replaces 33 percent of our aging fleet," said Carman, who added that he expects to request a similar order in the next fiscal year, with an annual goal of \$2.5 million dedicated to replacing district apparatus. The first new vehicles should arrive in the fourth quarter of next year.

Though he would not confirm that any of the new engines will be assigned to Lafayette stations 15 or 17, Carman did say that one of the new

trucks will be delivered to station 1 in Walnut Creek, which is the first backup for structure fires in Lafayette. He also confirmed that the new squad vehicle, ordered earlier this fall, will arrive at station 1 on Jan. 17. It, too, will back up calls into Lafayette.

The cost recovery ordinance allows ConFire to collect reimbursement from insurance providers for the actual costs of its services rendered on emergency medical calls. Carman stressed to the board that all costs recovered will be from the insurance companies or the federal government and not from individuals. "Not collecting this fee is subsidizing the insurance companies," he told the

ConFire Advisory Fire Commission the previous evening. Though individuals without insurance will still be billed, the district expects to facilitate a compassionate collection approach for those without the ability to pay. Carman anticipates \$1 million in annual reimbursements, but he said that a consultant suggested the amount could exceed \$1.5 million.

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District, less than one-tenth the size of ConFire and sporting vastly different demographics, generated \$100,000 in first responder fees in the last fiscal year, according to administrative services director Gloriann Sasser.

Community Service

Lafayette Participates in Regional Drill for Large Scale Emergency

Submitted by Carol Yates



From left: LEPC commissioners Mike Melewicz and Carol Yates, County Health Service representative Ken Binkley, LEPC commissioner Duncan Seibert
 Photo provided

Members of the Lafayette Emergency Preparedness Commission recently attended a regional anthrax drill in El Cerrito. Commissioners Michael Melewicz, Duncan Seibert, and Carol Yates joined Contra Costa Health Services, American Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), and county wide volunteers to partic-

ipate in the exercise.

The drill practiced the establishment of a mock "point-of-dispensing," or POD, site and the delivery of emergency supplies. During the two and half hours the POD was operational, 870 mock doses of life saving medication were distributed.

Training exercises such as these help the City of Lafayette to be able

to rapidly respond to disasters such as an earthquake, wildfire, hazardous material spill, or act of terrorism. Though this drill focused on the response to a bioterrorism event, the planning and collaboration that took place as part of this exercise will help prepare Lafayette for any type of health emergency.

Following the 2001 anthrax attacks, the federal government directed all health departments in the United States to develop plans to rapidly and safely provide medication to the public in the event of a public health emergency. The current exercise was organized by Bay Area Mass Prophylaxis Working Group, formed to coordinate planning and response efforts, which also created the website www.BayAreaDisasterMeds.org to provide the public with information on where to get medication in the event of a real emergency. You can help speed up the process by going to this website and filling out a form to keep ready in the event it is needed.

The goal for Lafayette is to distribute medication within 48 hours to all 23,000 residents and first respon-

ders in the event of a chemical or biological attack. In case of such an incident requiring emergency mass oral antibiotics prophylaxis, the Lafayette Police Department will receive the antibiotic supplies through the county and ensure delivery of them to the Lafayette POD operations site. Volunteers who have been trained will assist in dispensing.

LEPC commissioners also recently attended a FEMA-sponsored program and a statewide exercise to study concepts, plans, and capabilities related to a patient surge during a potential anthrax exposure with a focus on delivering key messages to the public.

Commissioner Michelle Heckle and chair Fred Lothrop keep the commission, including Sherry Hoover and George Figone, informed on the educational programs. The commission works closely with Chief Eric Christensen and Cathy Moscato of the Lafayette Police Department, and Dennis Rein, Emergency Coordinator for Lamorinda. For more information, email lepccarol@gmail.com.

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Humanities	\$220,600
Arts (Visual & Industrial Arts)	\$174,550
Math & Engineering	\$151,000
World Language	\$118,700
Student Services	\$99,300
K-8 Health Education	\$70,000
K-8 Professional Development	\$35,000
2014-15 Total	\$2,433,100





Letters to the Editor



Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:

It's so unfortunate how all parties involved in the "Vivian" OUSD residency case handled this issue. Clearly there are many potential factors at play here, and few of us have the whole picture. I strongly urge OUSD to take quick public action to clarify their policies. I would recommend the following:

- OUSD and AUSD should establish a joint task force to work on this issue. (Since most students in OUSD go on to an AUSD high school, it's important that the residency policy be consistent between the two districts.)
- The task force should consist of Orinda citizens and representatives of both school boards. It might be best to do this once the new board members have been sworn in.
- Both districts should immediately post their current policies on their websites, and publish them in local newspapers. We all need to know not only what the current policies are, but exactly how and when concerns about a student's residency in the district are investigated. For example, what steps are taken before a private investigator is called in?
- The task force should then hold a series of public meetings to invite everyone to express their concerns and ideas.
- The task force should then develop an initial proposal regarding requirements for residency, and exactly how concerns regarding residency will be handled. This should be published on the districts' websites in and local papers.
- Public meetings should be held to get input regarding the new guidelines.
- New guidelines are then finalized by the task force.
- Guidelines are clearly posted on the district websites.

Given the strong feelings this situation has engendered in the Orinda community, I urge the districts to be totally transparent and responsive to public comment. I also urge all that participate in the discussions to be civil; we all want to do what is best for students in the district.

Deborah Sedberry
Orinda

Editor:

A Practical Housing Strategy for Orinda.

The Housing Element process has been one Orinda has been obliged to complete in 2014, but the conversation about affordable housing needs to expand to the renewal of downtown and the role of housing in its future development.

The City, acting in its own best interests - not because it may be

required by the State, should pursue the development of housing, some of which should be affordable. The most feasible location for new housing development is in the City's commercial districts, particularly in Orinda Village where there are several underdeveloped properties.

Over 70% of the land area in Orinda Village is devoted to surface parking - not an appropriate way to utilize valuable downtown land. The City correctly proposes higher density and underground parking for mixed use - housing in this area. However, current land values and costs associated with underground parking would preclude affordable housing except for some small percentage.

The various underdeveloped properties in Orinda Village provide opportunities for more intensive development of mixed-use retail and office as well as housing, all of which would benefit the City financially through enhanced property and sales taxes. Equally important, development that is well planned, well designed and which creates a charming "village" character would enliven the area making it more attractive to businesses and shoppers as well as future residents.

Chapter 17.1 of the City's Municipal Code cites the specific purposes of the "downtown district regulations", which could further the intent of revitalizing downtown areas. These include the following: "...regulate development to achieve a vibrant community center over time"; "provide for multifamily housing, including affordable housing in downtown areas"; "establish incentives, such as additional building height, higher floor area or broader range of permitted uses to help achieve a vibrant community center" These are laudable objectives, which the City should accept as an obligation.

In order to "achieve a vibrant community center" the City needs to develop an implementation strategy to accomplish it.

Orinda does not need a grandiose downtown plan. All that is required are some basic zoning modifications together with some modest development studies of specific downtown sites and overall downtown economic and marketing studies to determine the feasibility of potential retail commercial, office and housing development.

Orinda's effort on the Housing Element will soon be completed and submitted to the State. Once accepted, the City Council should devote its attention and energy to pursuing efforts to revitalize its downtown, including affordable housing in the process. It has the opportunity and indeed the obligation to do so without delay.

Michael Kaplan
Orinda

Editor:

City Ventures (CV) proposed development is too large for the land on Moraga Way. City Ventures often uses smoke and mirrors to violate the General Plan and disregard the residents.

CV claims it resembles the Moraga Country Club (MCC) houses. Seriously, all you have to do is look at the plan to see this is rubbish: You see the MCC houses look like dots, then you see what looks like a shopping mall. MCC houses are much smaller, 2 stories, have a setback of 35 - 60 feet, extensive vegetation (and approximately 10 MCC houses could fit on that lot, not 36)! CV duplexes/triplexes on Country Club Drive are setback 4.9 feet!

CV's traffic report is a joke. We should demand an independent traffic report. The town has not run it's own traffic report. It is normal process for a town to do so, to not appear biased. In Moraga if a development adds 20 or more cars to rush hour, then it must report the findings to Orinda and Lafayette. Well, surprise, surprise, CV claims (absurdly) that it will increase only 19 cars to the morning commute and 9 in the evening - with 90 parking spaces and potentially more cars. This is a commuting neighborhood, and kids are driven to school, the traffic impact on Moraga Way and Road will far exceed 19! A gentleman attending a meeting last year, plugged numbers into a traffic program, and got a much larger number.

More deception: CV calls 3 stories : "2 stories with a loft"; it calls the tiny piece of land a "park" because open space is required for all development; duplexes and triplexes along CCD are "cottages".

The bias of the town towards CV is often obvious. A planning commissioner said that she did not like the shock value of story poles, so perhaps they can find a way to not use them. The reason they shock us is it reveals reality: suddenly the smoke and mirrors are stripped...something the residents are entitled to learn.

There should be an environmental review specifically for this project like the General Plan requires.

If the project was 24 - 2 story houses, the residents would accept it. However, as Charity from CV claims, "CV would not make as much money." That is a truthfulness that reveals all.

At every meeting the town and CV spend the entire time trying to find ways to hide it's size. This was noticed by a planning commissioner, who recommended it be less dense to fit the site. Why not take all that energy to come up with something that fits and everyone likes, while honoring Moraga?

Margaret Gee
Moraga

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Business

Thalia's Capo, a Success Story

By Sophie Braccini



Thalia and Chris Bradley; Thalia's guitar sports a brand new capo.

Photo Sophie Braccini

Entrepreneurship must be in Orinda resident Thalia Bradley's genes; how cool is it for a 12-year-old to be at the initiation of an invention, and the creation of a product that blew all expectations on Kickstarter? The most important

thing Thalia discovered is that at the root of any invention is the identification of a need, and that needs are all around us in our everyday life waiting to be recognized and transformed into great business ideas.

Thalia was 8 years old, lounging

in her bedroom, when she spotted discordance – on her wall was a poster of Taylor Swift with a guitar. "I noticed how unaesthetic the capo on the guitar was," remembers the OIS student. "I thought it should match her guitar." A capo is a device that

clamps down on the fret to change the key. Thalia, a guitar student herself, also found that moving the capo required her to stop playing and was not easy for little hands.

Thalia shared her thoughts with her father, Chris Bradley – a serial entrepreneur. In his futuristic half-dome lab, prototypes of inventions that became commercial successes can be found on every shelf. Bradley listened to his daughter, recognized the bright idea and started working with dual specifications: create something that has the same aesthetic and craftsmanship as a guitar and can be easily operated with one hand while being strong enough to maintain pressure on the strings.

"It took us four years to design the end product," says Bradley, handling a beautiful capo, inlaid with rosewood. "At some point we almost gave up," he adds, recalling the difficulties the engineering group of 2ND Edison, Bradley's company, had creating a proper spring to hold the capo in place but still release easily. He says that the result met all expectations. "All along the process Thalia was very involved, testing it, giving advice on the different inlays."

The capos come in 32 different finishes, including Birdseye maple, rosewood, lacewood, and blue abalone. The part that presses on the cords, the sliding fret pad, is made of a proprietary material composed of thermoplastic and Teflon, making it super strong, yet smooth and non-sticky.

In order to fund the budding company, Bradley decided to put the project on Kickstarter, a crowd-funding platform; Kickstarter gives people 22 days to raise the money they need. Their initial goal was to raise \$10,000; if additional funding was

obtained they planned to expand the project. Within 22 days, Thalia Capo raised \$195,221 with 3,846 backers from all over the world. "People went crazy over the capos," said Bradley, "they bought two or three of them; they match the inlays to their different guitars." Bradley said that they knew the capos were a great idea, but seeing that thousands of people were willing to buy them even before they were produced was validation.

Now the Bradleys are in the production phase and will soon ship the first capos. The metal parts are made in Asia. Bradley said he looked for a local manufacturer but could not find one with competitive pricing. The different wood and abalone inlays come from the U.S. "We cut it ourselves with our laser cutter and fix it on the capo," he explains. "We test each of them ourselves before putting them in the shipping box." Thalia participates in this process, putting on white gloves and making sure the capos are polished and free of any marks before shipment.

Bradley deposited patents for the capo. His daughter's name is on the ownership list and she is also part of the company that manufactures the capos. Capos can still be pre-ordered on Kickstarter at www.thaliacapos.com/latebacker.

Thalia wants to carry this business on for a while, and have it ramp up. The online store will open in 2015. "I want to grow the business for a least a year and then we'll make a decision," said Bradley. In the meantime, he adds, Thalia has had another great idea – but he was not willing to divulge any details.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

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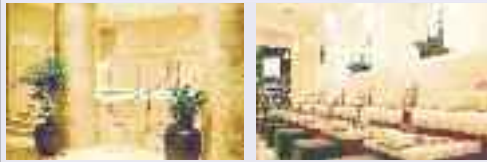
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Leslie Darwin O'Brien

business briefs

Business Anniversary

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This year marks the 20th anniversary of Scientific Symposiums International, a Moraga-based business since 1994. The company, owned by Carol Haag, specializes in continuing medical education for physicians in the specialties of surgical pathology and dermatopathology. Since its founding, the company has awarded Continuing Medical Education credits to some 10,000 physicians from around the world who attend courses in Hawaii, South Carolina and Virginia. The company is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education and the American Boards of Pathology and Dermatology. Haag started her career as a journalist before moving to corporate communication in the health industry. She became the layperson on the board of a medical center and did market research for future businesses. "I've met so many terrific people over the years," says Haag, "and at the same time the business is simply run from my home in Moraga, where we built an office." From her desk, Haag can see the vineyard she planted on her property and she even has time for the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association, in which she plays an active role.



Carol Haag Photo provided

Moraga Employee of the Month

Karin Kasra, a branch service officer at Union Bank in Moraga, has been named the Moraga employee of the month for November. A banking veteran with 40 years in the banking industry, Kasra was one of the original employees to open the Moraga Union Bank branch in 2007 and she has served as a key customer service representative for the past seven years. Kasra



From left: Kevin Reneau, Karin Kasra, Lori Sato, Debbie Roessler Photo provided

News from the Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce proposes a Lafayette gift card to be used all around town. Go to GiftCards.com and search for Lafayette Chamber of Commerce; choose the denomination you want for your card. It's a nice way to support local businesses and keep sales tax dollars working for the community. Limited supply available at the chamber office, 100 Lafayette Circle, Suite 103.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com



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Lafayette

Photo Contest is Back for More

"A Day in the Life of Lafayette" was fascinating this past summer solstice – the longest day of the year; it should be just a bit more challenging on the shortest day of the year. Consider this an open invitation to innovative photographers who live or work in Lafayette. The Public Art Committee wants to know what Lafayette looks like to you. Creative souls will have 24 hours on Dec. 21 to capture their images, then a few weeks to submit them to the "A Day in the Life" photo contest. There are three easy requirements: submit the online registration form to the City of Lafayette Public Art Committee by Jan. 9; pictures should be 11 x 14 photographic prints in black and white or color – smaller photos are acceptable but must be mounted on an 11 x 14 black matboard; a digital image must be submitted as well. For complete details, go to the city website, www.love-lafayette.org/photocontest. - C. Tyson

Lafayette

City Finances Look Healthy

... continued from page A2

Although new to the City of Lafayette, Wakeman knows her way around a balance sheet. She was a senior accountant for seven years in Walnut Creek, and worked

for four years as Moraga's finance manager. She has a bachelor's degree from Boston College in finance and marketing and a master's in public administration from Cal

State East Bay. "We are confident that Ms. Wakeman is well qualified to continue the prudent financial practices the City has established and enhance them," said Robinson.

Moraga

New School Board Hits the Ground Running

... continued from page A5

With her older children now in high school and college, O'Donnell believes that knowing the district's "end-product" and not having a personal agenda are advantages. "It is about all the kids in this community, and educating the whole child," she says. Nickens' children are in second and fifth grade, with a third still in preschool, while Obsitnik's two children attend elementary school. "It is good for the board to have members who are part of the mix, it gets us closer to the topics," noted Obsitnik.

Each new member has issues he or she is particularly interested in. Obsitnik has a very sharp focus on student safety. He also became interested in how all of the schools work together to establish common practices when he and his wife tried to get

their daughter transferred to another elementary school that had a reputation for handling food allergies more efficiently. Nickens, who volunteered in the computer lab, is aware of the children's different levels of proficiency. "It's one thing to work on a tablet, but it's another to learn to type, to access a website, to choose what information is valuable and what is not," says Nickens.

All three express their respect and appreciation for the work the teachers do in the classroom, particularly at this time of profound change in the curriculum. They do not have experience in directly managing public finances, but all have relevant corporate experience. None of them has negotiated with unions before, and they look forward

to a steep learning curve. "I did not ask how much work will come with this volunteer position," says O'Donnell. "I know I will do what has to be done. What is important is the impact on the community, and doing something that matters."

"Yes, this is a new board," says Simon. "Parker (Colvin) and I have a solid understanding of the district, the strategic plan and where we are going. (Superintendent Bruce Burns) is very seasoned, with strong leadership. The new members have been involved in the schools, they bring a breadth of experience, and I'm confident that it will be a very solid board." Simon adds that the district is in very good shape; the biggest challenge remains the funding, a problem that "never goes away."

Lafayette

Mayor Don Tatzin Shifts Positions

... continued from page A3

Progress has been made to join the Moraga Orinda Fire District and the Contra Costa Fire District in a special shared station. About the ongoing Terraces of Lafayette development off of Deer Hill Road, Tatzin joked, "I successfully punted on that issue."

Due to the very healthy budget situation, he added, "Financially we're in great shape."

Newly installed Mayor Anderson tipped his hat, commenting, "He's had a remarkable career with no signs of slowing down."

Thanks to his efforts, Lafayette celebrated the first ever Dogtown Downtown event to highlight beloved canines with a fun filled party that had an educational component at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. The second annual event is slated for April.

Reilly said she is humbled and honored by the opportunity to serve as vice mayor. She had special thanks for her accommodating family, noting their sacrifice – council meetings can start early, so they have to fend for themselves for dinner. "If you have teenagers, you know that's a very big deal," she said.

Orinda

Orinda Housing Element Draft Headed to State for Initial Review

... continued from page A6

"The existing zoning in place that was adopted through the fourth cycle Housing Element remains in place, and satisfies the city's obligation for zoning to meet the Regional Housing Needs Allocation." Orinda could simply "lay out all of the alternatives with the understanding that the city would select a final alternative at a later date prior to adoption of the document."

After council members received comment from 30 more community members and probed staff and the city's attorney with questions for more than an hour, that is exactly what the council decided to do. Staff will transmit the latest Housing Element draft to the state, and hopes to have comments back from the Department of Housing and Community Development in late February. In the interim, staff will work with representatives of Pacific Municipal Consultants to draft responses to the numerous public comments received regarding the draft Environmental Impact Report. Once HCD issues its comments, the city will then schedule another meeting to allow further public input. Staff hopes to send Orinda's revised draft back to HCD in March so that the finalized Housing Element can be adopted in April.

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Giving Dreams an Address

Lamorinda

Higher Water Bills for Lamorinda?

That depends on Mother Nature

By Cathy Tyson

Prior to the first big storm of the winter season the East Bay Municipal Utility District's board of directors adopted measures in response to the drought, with the potential to raise customers' bills.

The utility is calling for increased customer conservation on a voluntary basis. Early this year, customers were asked to cut back 10 percent of their water usage. This suggestion was successful with all district customers combined - residential, commercial and irrigation - reducing their use by 12.6 percent compared to 2013. Now EBMUD is asking for even more voluntary conservation, requesting that customers cut back 15 percent starting on New Year's Day, Jan. 1.

Equally important, if needed, depending on Mother Nature, the utility will make a second purchase of water

from the Sacramento River. "This is our third dry year in a row. Our customers' ongoing conservation before and during this drought is one reason why we have not had to ask for harsh cutbacks," said board president Andy Katz. "We do expect some more rain this winter, but possibly not enough."

Back in April, EBMUD purchased and delivered 18,600 acre feet of water from the Sacramento River. The \$8 million cost of purchasing, pumping and treating that water was absorbed by the district. At its Dec. 9 meeting the board of directors considered making a second purchase. Depending on relatively near term rainfall, if the board decides to go ahead with the purchase customers will see a 14 percent surcharge on their bills. According to Abby Figueroa, senior public information

representative, EBMUD residential customers could see their bills increase by an average of \$4.30 per month, depending on their level of conservation, until drought costs are paid.

"Recent storms are helping, but water supply is about more than rain. It's about the timing of storms, temperatures and how long snow stays on the ground before it melts," said general manager Alexander Coate. "We will need at least the average level of precipitation this winter and spring to be in better shape than we were this past year," he said.

Precipitation in the Mokelumne watershed was only half of normal from July, 2013 to June, 2014. EBMUD reservoirs received only one-third of their normal runoff, making it the fifth driest year on record.



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Moraga

Sand Bagged



CERT volunteers filled sandbags the evening of Dec. 10 in anticipation of the impending storm. Two hundred bags were filled by 5:40 p.m.; two hours later, they were all gone. Pictured, from left: Gordon Nathan, John Burgess, Tim Freeman, John Haffner; not pictured, Ellen Beans and Rob Lucacher.

Photo Rob Lucacher

Moraga

Moraga's New Council Member – Teresa Onoda

... continued from page A4



Photo A. Scheck

Onoda says she was attracted to art since her very early years. "I always loved art and remember riding my bicycle to the Des Moines Art Center on weekends when I was still in grade school," she said. "As soon as I took my first formal art course in high school, I knew that this would always be part of my career."

Her artistry evolved over the years and she experimented with many kinds of art, but it took a back seat to raising her children when they were very young. "When we moved to Moraga in 1989, I met Pam Glover, one of the premier plein air painters in California, and began to develop into a professional artist," she stated. "My relationship with Pam Glover evolved to the point where we were painting partners on a weekly basis for years. Sadly, Pam passed away in 2010." Onoda almost always paints

in outdoor locations somewhere in the Bay Area. If the weather is poor, she might stay home and paint under the covered entryway of her front porch. On very rare occasions, she paints inside her house near a window that allows natural light to reach the canvas.

For the past 15 years, Onoda has been creating paintings that have been displayed in galleries in downtown San Francisco and Carmel. Her work has also been in galleries in Vail, Colo., and in Palm Desert, Calif. She has conducted workshops in California, New Mexico, Iowa and Michigan. "When I'm painting, I lose any sense of myself and become part of the landscape," she said. "I feel like I am part of nature, not a person standing apart from it. That's why I feel so strongly about preserving natural beauty."

When she is not painting, Onoda spends a lot of time doing all of the things a small business owner must do - marketing, managing finances, keeping up her supplies, hanging shows, managing her online presence and working with various gallery owners and show curators.

stretch of Donald Drive that Rheem Elementary School kids were using where there was no sidewalk," she remembered. "I helped to form a group that helped get a grant that paid for a sidewalk so the students could move about safely." Another event was the golf course at Palos Colorados, which as originally proposed, she felt, would have blocked the migration corridor for wildlife. "I was involved with a group of citizens who raised money to pay for expert reports that informed the discussion and ultimately led to the elimination of the golf course from the proposal," she said.

Onoda got involved with her art organizing a yearly open space art exhibit, and participating in an art "paint out" and art show on the slopes of Mount Diablo for Save Mount Diablo.

She was appointed to the Moraga Planning Commission two years ago. "I gained a working knowledge of Moraga's General Plan, the town's ordinances, the procedural mechanics of the commission and town council and boards, the roles and contributions of town staff members and the constellation of concerned citizens providing input into all of the local activities," she said. Now on the council she will place a high priority on preserving Moraga's open spaces and ridgelines, and will work on improving residents' participation.

'Knucklehead Santa' and 'Chaz' Deliver More Than Gifts

By Diane Claytor



Alan Smith (Chaz, the elf), upper left, smiles with fellow elves and "Knucklehead Santa," Alex Cox. Photos provided

From January through November, Lafayette's Alex Cox and Orinda's Alan Smith are like most other suburban husbands and fathers: they go to work every morning, attend sporting events, vacation with their families and help their kids with homework. But come December, Cox, a small business owner, and Smith, a corporate attorney, take on their alter-egos, becoming their own version of Santa Claus (Cox) and his trusty elf, Chaz (Smith).

Best friends since their high school days in Oakland, the two, who are equally passionate and often finish each other's sentences, describe themselves as fun-loving and goofy. And it's that silliness that brought them to co-found OakLuv, an organization created to bring joy and happiness to underprivileged families in East Oakland.

Smith's 1963 classic convertible was the unintended impetus when, six years ago, the two boys-at-heart decided to dress up as Santa and his elf and drive around, blaring holiday music. The idea grew; they bought candy canes and small toys to hand out. "Then it was, OK, where should we go to bring smiles to a lot of people?" Cox said.

Having grown up in East Oakland, Cox suggested going to his old neighborhood. They pulled up to his

childhood home on 38th Avenue and "people just started coming out of their houses," Smith continued. "We're dressed as Santa and his elf, talking to the people that now live in Alex's former house, and more and more kids start coming around. All of a sudden, we're handing out toys and candy to all these kids." Finishing the story, Cox explained that "it was quite silly and over the top. We weren't actually trying to be Santa or an elf, we were just being ourselves with our own little twist."

When they first started, both men admit, it really wasn't to be altruistic. "I don't think we were necessarily trying to be super nice," Smith said.

"It was more lets go have some fun and hand things out. But then, something changed. When we were handing out toys, looking at all the kids' and parents' faces ... they were so happy and it was so touching. And it was so easy to do. So the next year we stepped it up." And they've "stepped it up" every year since.

Four years ago, OakLuv adopted two classes at an East Oakland elementary school. With the assistance of friends who annually host a party and raise money to benefit OakLuv, 50 kindergartners received a jacket and toys from Knucklehead Santa (as Cox refers to himself), Chaz and his team of elves. ... continued on page B4



"Knucklehead Santa" arrives in Oakland.

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New Open Meditation Circle Widens in Moraga

By Sophie Braccini



Participants in the Moraga meditation circle.

Photo Sophie Braccini

Feeling stressed or overwhelmed? A solution could be just around the corner – the new Monday morning meditation circle housed at the Career Wisdom Institute in Moraga.

The Buddhist-inspired and free-form practice starts with a few short words from whomever is leading the circle that day, followed by a half-hour silent meditation, with an optional discussion afterward. The circle is opened to all, from seasoned meditation practitioners to beginners.

“The five of us wanted to create a Sangha (Buddhist term meaning community), a place where people would come together to meditate,” says Monica Moore. “(This practice) brings a lot of stillness in my life and a feeling of community.”

Four women, including Moore, Sherry Berman, Leah Fisher and Gaby Gervais-Mozée, all knew Maura Wolf. “Maura and I have practiced (meditation) for the last two to three years with different groups of moms in Moraga,” explains Moore, while Berman knew her through the Saint Mary's Leadership Center, where Wolf works, and her own Career Wisdom Institute. They chose a place off Country Club Drive for a weekly gathering. All have experience with meditation, some for many years, and they all emphasize the pleasure of creating this new circle in their town.

The large room is flooded with morning light at 10:30 a.m., and a circle is formed with comfy armchairs and more spartan chairs; some bring their own meditation pillow where they sit cross-legged. The group, in their 30s to 70s, is welcoming, non-judgmental and mostly, but not exclusively, women. The session begins with a leader – sometimes Mozée, Berman, or Wolf – sometimes a guest speaker, asking if anyone wants guidance or wants to discuss something before the practice starts. When a bell chimes, silence falls on the room.

“It's invaluable to have something local at that time of the day; you can drop kids at school if you have kids, and find a group of people to meditate with,” says Julia Wolinski, who heard about the group on the Nextdoor Corliss neighborhood site. Fisher adds that it was a wonderful surprise to discover that there were so many meditation practitioners tucked away in Lamorinda.

All of the participants agree the space is grounding and peaceful. A.J. Brown, who's the associate business director at the CAPA dance studio, needed a place outside of home and work at least once a week to capture a moment of stillness in an otherwise chaotic life. “It's amazingly nourishing for the soul and the spirit,” she says. “It gives me an excuse to be still. At home or work there is always the pressure of everything that has to be


done, but here there is no guilt about doing something for myself.” Mozée adds, as one meditates, time expands, and in fact you have more time for the rest of your day.

For Jen Varela, meditation is a spiritual practice, a way of life that compliments any religion. The mother of five children ages 9 to 14 was diagnosed with Sezary syndrome, a rare form of cutaneous lymphoma, with a difficult prognosis; but the woman speaks of it openly and with no anger. “We have the ability to take things positively or negatively,” says Varela, “and I'm going to take it positively and positive things have happened because of it.”

She encourages her teen children to participate in a meditation group for adolescents, and so does Moore who has implemented a ritual in her own house. Moore has four children ages 7 to 16, and the family meditates every week together before going to Mass at their church; they also meditate every night before dinner. “I try to teach them to be more aware and create a space between their thoughts, their emotions and their actions,” says Moore.

Anyone interested in the group can come for the 10:30 a.m. practice on Monday mornings at 1036 Country Club Drive, Suite 100, in Moraga. A small wicker basket for donations sits by the door; donations are used to contribute to the space.

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The Tiptoes of Happiness

By Laurie Snyder

*“When it all comes true
 Just the way you planned
 It's funny but the bells don't ring
 It's a quiet thing.”*
 — Fred Ebb and John Kander

Born and raised in Little Rock, Ark., longtime Lamorindan Leslie Darwin O'Brien began singing when she was just 6 years old. “Our house was filled with so much joy; we had hardwood floors so the music resonated through the house – all sorts of music. I grew up listening to my dad's incredibly beautiful voice as he stood beside me singing in church. My sisters and I also put on shows for our parents.” By the time she was in ninth grade, she was touring nationally. “Music broadened my horizons.”

She finished school before embarking on a 15-year career in the entertainment industry. Supporting herself as a cater-waiter in between parts in Tony Kelly's “Faust” and other thought-provoking off-Broadway shows, she lived a life many others have lacked the courage to pursue. But as much as she enjoyed that time, she says, she “was incredibly lucky that life took a different path.” The Stanford grad found love with her husband, Tim O'Brien, welcomed three boys to the world, and now serves as the Director of Community Life at the Orinda Community Church. This past April, she and her husband joined with other Lamorindans to raise a significant sum of money to benefit victims of the Boston Marathon bombing.

In the midst of it all, fate came knocking. A friend serendipitously suggested that Moraga resident, Terry Miller, would be a perfect music teacher for one of O'Brien's sons. As O'Brien became better acquainted with Miller, she learned that he just also happened to be an internationally renowned bassist who has performed with everyone from Amy Grant to Debbie Harry, the Doobie Brothers, Jimmy Buffett, Patsy Cline, Emmy Lou Harris, Stan Kenton, and Vince Gil.



Leslie Darwin O'Brien Photo provided

In addition to a shared love of music, O'Brien and Miller have both founded successful youth education programs. Terry's Kids (tmkids.org) is Miller's nonprofit which is keeping music in San Francisco Bay Area schools while spearheading a music exchange program with Havana, Cuba this February. GirlPower is O'Brien's brainchild. (See “Orinda Community Church Aunties Up” in the Lamorinda Weekly's online archives.)

As their acquaintance grew into friendship, Miller began lobbying O'Brien to step out from the security of her church choir to return to solo performance. Her friends and fellow church members also nudged and prodded. “I could not have done this 30 years ago at all. I wouldn't have anything to bring to it,” says O'Brien. “I also couldn't have done it without their support and the support of my wonderful family.” Those who have already purchased the CD are calling O'Brien's sound soothing – something they pop in for their daily drive times and for lifetime in general. One friend even played the disc to ease the passing of a terminally ill relative.

... continued on page B8



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A Mermaid in Moraga

By Cathy Dausman



Alison "Ali" Williams, the mermaid

Photos Cathy Dausman

Imagine working on a treadmill while holding your breath. Then complete your workout upside down ... and underwater.

Such is the current life of Alison "Ali" Williams, who happily devotes six hours daily, six days a week submerged in Campolindo High School's SODA pool to practice with the USA Synchro National Swim Team.

She is one of only two non-collegiate synchro swimmers in the country (Concord teammate Mariya Koroleva is the other) and one of nine members on "team one," together since September, making their international debut at the French Open in March – a 10th member joins in January. The team will compete at the Pan American Games in Toronto, Canada, but their focus is the bi-annual World Aquatics Championships in Kazan, Russia, beginning July 24.

Williams has lived for the sport, training on her own since she was 10, and sacrificed in the process. Yet she calls herself a mermaid, and describes synchro swimming as a "dream job."

"I'm pretty quiet, go to bed early, and [am] very low maintenance. I am very focused on training for the Olympics so my lifestyle is pretty simple and hardworking," she said. Home-schooled through high school, Williams attended UCLA for three years, where she majored in sociology. She left school, moved to Indianapolis to train with a synchro swim team, then dropped the sport for two

and a half years.

"It's a long time to be away from the sport and come back," she admitted. Some said she'd be too old to compete, but she attended team try-outs at Diablo Valley College last June. Suddenly the "location, the coaching and training schedule" felt right, Williams said. She made more sacrifices: relocating to Lamorinda, leaving family, and sleeping for 10 weeks in a 30-foot trailer with "no electricity, no heat, no refrigerator, no bathroom." Yet Williams loved "the peace, quiet, and shelter it provided."

She'd sleep with her clothes in the bed, to warm them before rising at 5 a.m. and cycling to the pool. She microwaved her breakfast there before morning practice, showered at the pool, and visited the library where she read, warmed herself and recharged her phone. Williams sought more permanent lodging when the weather turned, and found a house-sitting position in Moraga through social media. Williams said she has found a welcoming swim community in Lamorinda, which helps with her transition.

The Synchro swimmers range in age from 16 to mid-20s. It is an all-women's sport, although one male performs at the World Championships in Russia. Williams, who turned 25 Nov. 30, is the oldest. Seven members came out of clubs with reputations for turning out Olympic swimmers (five trained with the Santa

Clara Aquamaids, two with the Walnut Creek Aquanets). A sixth member trained on a team in suburban Buffalo, N.Y. Williams, who was raised in Southern California and had a swimming pool in her backyard, is unaffiliated.

These competitors swim as a group of eight or in duets. There are also categories for solo and combo performances. Strength, flexibility, and lung capacity are key to success in a sport where swimmers spend up to two minutes of every three-and-a-half-minute-long routine submerged, overcoming the body's natural urge to surface for air.

Much like an iceberg, the synchro support team is more than just its members. The coaching staff consists of Olympian and head coach Myriam Glez and assistant coach Lolli Montico, plus a choreographer, a doctor, a nutritionist, a physiologist and a sports psychologist.

What solidifies the experience, Williams explained, is that the entire staff is "all on the same page." Training, which includes out of the pool stretching and in the water acrobatics, runs from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Bedtime is 9 p.m.

When asked what she thinks about during practice, Williams said she strives to keep her mind "crystal clear."

"If you're thinking about what's ahead, you'll be late," she said. Williams' business card lists her as "athlete, coach and performer," but says she can't afford to miss crucial practice time any more to coach.

"It's my dream job ... I'm a mermaid," she said happily. "I have no plans to leave this sport."

The USA Synchro National Team will perform for the public at 3:30 p.m. Dec. 20 at Campolindo High School's SODA pool, when the team will present their swim routines for the 2015 Pan American Games and International Swimming Federation World Championships. Admission is \$10. To learn more about the USA Synchro Swim National Team, go to <http://tinyurl.com/ly24chd>.



From left, back to front: Isabel Malcolmson (white cap, yellow lenses), Sarah Rodriguez (gray cap, blue goggles), Anita Alvarez (black cap, silver lenses), Karensa Tjoa (black cap, gold lenses), Claire Barton (center), Pheobe Coffin (black cap, gold lenses), Sandra Ortellado (red and white cap, white lenses), and Alison Williams (pink straps, purple suit); not pictured: Mariya Koroleva

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"THE KNOT"

Free Spirit Van for Seniors

By Cathy Tyson

No, it wasn't Santa's elves that stuffed a van down a chimney to serve elders in the community. Thanks to the hard work of Lamorinda Senior Transportation Coordinator Mary Bruns a brand new 12-passenger wheelchair accessible Spirit Van was obtained, free of charge, bringing the fleet up to three vehicles.

In the past, Bruns was able to obtain a 5310 Federal Grant which covered all but 11 percent of the cost, which is shared by the City of Lafayette, the Town of Moraga and the Community Foundation of Orinda. This time around, she was able to secure the federal grant for most of the \$67,000 price tag, and in addition found state toll credits that paid for the balance of the cost. "It really helped," said Bruns.

The Spirit Vans are busy Monday through Friday, and most Sundays, taking seniors from Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda to lunch at the Walnut Creek Senior Center and to doctors' appointments, to church, on errands, and more. The brand new Spirit Van is naked - just waiting for a break in the weather so that signage decals can be affixed.

The newest van can seat a dozen ambulatory people or four wheelchairs plus six ambulatory people. Drivers volunteer their



Several of the Spirit Van drivers and dispatchers smile in front of one of three vans now servicing Lamorinda seniors. Photo provided

time in 4-hour shifts once per week, they also help passengers with packages and groceries to bring them into the house offering door through door service.

The Spirit Van has become increasingly popular with seniors; in fiscal year 2013-14 a grand total of 4,316 rides were delivered to older adults, more than double the amount of rides given when the program first started in 2006. In order to keep the program sustainable, rides generally cost \$5 for a one-way trip within Lamorinda and \$10 round trip; low income seniors get a discount equivalent to what they would pay on the County Connection bus. Those heading to the daily nutritious lunch program at the senior center, the lunch bunch, pay only \$2.50 each way. Lunch is a donation, and staff never say no.

The program has about a dozen drivers who volunteer their time "out of the kindness of their hearts," said Bruns, describing

them as a dedicated group. Former Spanish teacher at Miramonte High School then Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, Gabriela Mozee became a driver this past September. "We receive many compliments from our passengers who love our drivers and don't know what they would do without us," said Mozee.

She was impressed by the level of preparation required to start the job that took roughly a month to complete. "Mary Bruns, the director, gave me a very thorough manual about vehicle inspection and fundamentals on vehicle driving; requested letters of recommendation; and scheduled practical driving lessons with experienced drivers/teachers, and arranged for a workshop on elder abuse."

Drivers and donations are always needed. For more information about donating to or volunteering with the Spirit Van, call (925) 283-3534.

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'Knucklehead Santa' and 'Chaz' Deliver More Than Gifts

... continued from B1



A surprise visit at an Oakland elementary school.

"Santa just shows up, unannounced," Cox said. "The kids' jaws drop. The first year we did this, the teacher said, with tears in her eyes, 'I didn't think anyone cared about us.' There are so many touching moments," Cox continued.

Last year, Smith noted, they expanded again, providing gifts for women and children living in a shelter for domestic abuse victims. This year, they've added a second domestic abuse shelter as well as a preschool for children suffering from personal trauma. "We receive lists of what these women and children need and want and farm them out to our ever-growing network of friends and family who are eager to help," Smith said.

OakLuv has joined forces with the Oakland Fire Department's Random Acts of Kindness group, helping to fulfill wishes expressed in letters kids write to the firefighters. With sincere emotion, Cox told of one letter received from a boy living in a shelter. "He said he didn't want anything for Christmas but he hoped his two younger brothers would get presents. Santa, Chaz and our elves knocked on the shelter door, asked to see this young man and showered him, his brothers and other shelter residents, with gifts."

The house on 38th Avenue is still the site of OakLuv's biggest party. The family puts out signs in the neighborhood announcing Santa's ar-

rival. Last year, more than 400 gifts were distributed and, Smith exclaimed, "there was a line of kids winding around a city block." There was a piñata and a mariachi band. This year they're hoping to have a fire truck in addition to their fleet of classic convertibles driving Santa and his elves around.

"This whole thing has taken on a life of its own, and it's very humbling," Cox said. Smith added that "seeing the joy on the faces of kids and parents is just incredibly powerful and moving." They both agreed that, "little ol' Alan and Alex" stumbled onto something bigger than they ever could have imagined and both have been dramatically changed.

To learn how you can help bring happiness to underprivileged families, go to www.oakluv.org.



"Knucklehead Santa" shares a hug.

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SMC Organizes Peaceful Protest Following Ferguson and NY Indictment Decisions

By Sophie Braccini



Saint Mary's College students stage "die-in."

Photos Andy Scheck



Participants read poetry as part of the recent Saint Mary's College protest.

Approximately 200 Saint Mary's College students, faculty and staff joined the growing number of protests in the Bay Area that followed grand jury decisions not to indict police officers in the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. The group staged a "die-in" and held a candlelight vigil Dec. 4 to express their suffering and sadness surrounding the events.

Brother Charles Hilken and Jane Camarillo, vice provost for Student Life, organized a panel to provide a place for folks to talk, which resulted in creating a plan of action, fostering solidarity, and raising awareness of the issues surrounding police brutality.

"In the wake of lack of indictments for the murderers of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, there are protests across the nation and at their core are commonalities in story," said Saint Mary's Assistant Professor Raina J. León.

As part of the "die-in" students, faculty and staff marched into Oliver Hall with their hands raised chanting, "Hands up, don't shoot!" and then took turns discussing black versus white violence, telling multiple stories of abuse, and expressing their hurt in sometimes poetic and allegoric terms. Then after one last shouting of "Hands up, don't shoot," they fell to the ground, symbolizing the

shooting of Michael Brown.

The event was followed that evening with a candlelight vigil at the SMC chapel, where participants gathered for prayers, songs and reflection.

"Saint Mary's needs this, Moraga and the Lamorinda area needs this," said one of the organizers, SMC sophomore Rachel Hartley, after the vigil. "We are on these beautiful hills, in this beautiful area, and we can forget about other things that are going on." For black students on campus who are in the middle of finals, she added, it is hard to think about people out there who are dying. The young student said she felt sad that history keeps repeating itself and that there seems to be no way out, and that terrible events such as these killings overshadow the real progress that has been made.

"We need to recognize that there are police officers who try their hardest to protect lives, but if there are too many police officers who are criminalizing black people and making them the demons, then it's going to be hard to look at the police officers as the good guy," she said.

Hartley would like to see more justice for all and deep reforms of the police and justice systems. She felt that the presence of faculty and staff at both events was very comforting to students.

The Saint Mary's group reached out to other colleges in the Bay Area. Their goal was to come from a place of peace and reflection in order to effect change without anger clouding their judgment.

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Girl Scout Helps Feral Kittens Through Gold Award Project

Submitted by Linda Bailey



Erin Wurgley Photos provided

The Girl Scouts of Northern California is pleased to have bestowed the highest honor possible for a Girl Scout, the Gold Award, to Acalanes High School graduate and current Diablo Valley College student Erin Wurgley of Lafayette, Troop 31042.

For the prestigious Gold Award, comparable to the Boy Scout Eagle Award, girls spend months or even years completing requirements that develop leadership and culminate in an extensive service project that makes a difference in their community or even across the world. In

2013, Girl Scouts of Northern California proudly conferred this honor to 152 outstanding young women.

To earn her Gold Award, Wurgley completed a project that developed the Lamorinda Feral Kitten Rescue Network. The project, which she began in August 2013, focused on community education, fostering, socializing, adoption, collection and distribution of donations and supplies for 4- to 8-week-old feral kittens. Kittens socialized between the ages of 4-8 weeks old have a high rate of adoptability as normal house cats. Since finishing the project, Wurgley continues to collaborate part-time with the Contra Costa County Feral Cat Foundation and SNIP (Spay Neuter Impact Program) for feral cats.

"It is an honor to bestow the Gold Award to exceptional girls like Erin whose commitment and initiative better themselves and the world around them," said Marina Park, CEO of Girl Scouts of Northern California.

"The intensive work behind the Gold Award epitomizes how Girl Scouting helps to set a girl on her path, and then she can take it anywhere from there."



Orinda Juniorettes Join In The Spirit of Giving

Submitted by Konnie Guo and Elizabeth Bennette



From left, top: Sondra Abruzzo, Leila Minowada, and Colleen McCullough; bottom: Sarah Rockwood, Konnie Guo, Madeleine Becker, and Lara Sanli Photo Colleen McCullough

It's hard to imagine a group of teenage girls sitting down to make quilts on a Saturday morning, but the Orinda Juniorettes have done just that. They have also donated a goat through Heifer International, supported girls' education through the Malala Fund, and knitted hats for premature babies.

The Orinda Juniorettes of California are a local group of high school girls who engage in various community service activities, some conventional and some quite unique. Started in 2010, the Juniorettes – a division of the Orinda Junior Women's Club and the General Federation of Women's Clubs – have monthly projects focusing on a specific charity. For September, they completed a total of 16 quilts which they plan to donate to children in need, specifically those who are homeless, suffer from HIV or AIDS, or were born drug addicted. With quilt kits provided by Children's Quilts/East Bay Heritage Quilters, the girls laid out patterns, ironed, and sewed together various quilts. More experienced sewers taught other members how to use the sewing machines. Juniorette member and vice president Konnie Guo says, "It's so great how we were able to have fun, learn how to sew quilts, and give back to the community with this project."

The group's November project was Operation Christmas Child, which the Juniorettes have

contributed to for the past three years. As a program dedicated to providing children in underprivileged areas with school supplies, toys, and clothing, Operation Christmas Child has gained the support of hundreds of thousands since its establishment in 1993.

Determined a few weeks in advance, each member purchased a few items, and met with the other members over a recent weekend. Some purchased crayons or markers, and others bought stuffed animals or hair clips. At the meeting, the Juniorettes distributed and packaged the gifts in shoe boxes, and wrapped up the boxes with holiday wrapping paper, ribbons and stickers. After a day of packaging gifts, a club member reflected, "Not only is it so much fun to embrace the holiday spirit with my friends, but Operation Christmas Child is such a worthy cause. Taking part in it allows us to make a difference and give back during the holiday season."

Next month, the Juniorettes plan on visiting and assisting at Saint Anthony's soup kitchen in San Francisco, having a bake sale, and preparing for a school-wide textbook drive in the spring. Juniorettes are always looking for new members, so if there are any high school girls living in the Lamorinda area who are interested, please email the Juniorettes at ojc.club@gmail.com.

Girl Scout Gold Award Project Brings Gift of Reading to India

Submitted by Patty Gonser



Acalanes High School senior Jenny Gonser reads with one of the girls, Krupa, at an orphanage in India. Photo provided

This past August, Acalanes High School senior Jenny Gonser volunteered over 150 hours to create a library for an orphanage in India for her Girl Scout Gold Award. She collected over 1,000 donated books and with the help of family, friends and high school church group members from Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, recorded 100 of the books to create a listening library for the 108 children currently living at the orphanage in Visakhapatnam, India.

The orphanage was started about nine years ago by Rosie and Anand Thandu, two software engineers who were born in India but were then living in Walnut Creek. "Rosie and Anand are amazing people who have dedicated their lives to helping to provide a loving home and food,

clothing and education to some of the very poor children in India," said Gonser's mother, Patty. "Prior to coming to the orphanage, many of the children had been abused, were malnourished and had never had a formal education."

Gonser used her babysitting money to buy 20 CD players and had batteries donated. With the LOPC high school youth group, Gonser brought all the books, CD players and batteries to India where she spent two weeks setting up the new library and training the teachers and students. The children and the teachers were thrilled and the listening library was a huge hit. The orphanage was recently damaged by the eye of Cyclone Hudhud. To learn more about the orphanage, and how to help, visit <http://childrenoffaithmissions.org/>.

Donation Requests from the Community



'Tis the Season of Giving

Roughing It Camp Joins Spirit of Giving

Join Roughing It in the spirit of giving this holiday season. We are collecting donations of coats, non-perishable food, and unwrapped toys until Dec. 18 for these wonderful causes: Coats for One Warm Coat, the Contra Costa Food Bank, and Toys for Tots. Drop off your items between 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Roughing It Camp Office, 1010 Oak Hill Road in Lafayette.

Support the Spirit Van Through Donations, Volunteering

The Lamorinda Spirit Van is a transportation program that offers affordable rides to local shopping centers and medical appointments for Lamorinda's most vulnerable older adults. Its clients are overwhelmingly widows in the later years of their lives who have not only outlived their husbands, but also their ability to drive. In most cases it offers some sort of independence, and avoids the need for these folks to rely on the generosity of friends and family or to move into institutions. Almost all the drivers are volunteers who donate the equivalent of about \$75,000 per year of their time to support the program. The program needs your help. A small donation from Lamorinda families could provide additional funds for the support of these vulnerable folks and improve individual lives "one trip at a time." Your tax-deductible check may be made payable to the City of Lafayette and mailed to: Lamorinda Spirit Van, c/o Lafayette Community Center, 500 St. Mary's Road, Lafayette, CA 94549. For anyone interested in becoming a volunteer driver, please call (925) 283-3534.

Orinda's 'Cans for a Cause' Food Drive

Benefits Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

Show how much you care, Orinda, by helping to collect 10,000 pounds of food this holiday season. Drop off your donations at specially marked collection bins at: Orinda City Hall, Orinda Community Center, the Orinda Union School District's administration building, or any of Orinda's elementary schools through Dec. 19. (Contact sites for specific collection dates and times.) Items needed: peanut butter, hearty soups, dried or canned beans, canned tuna and chicken, canned tomato products, 100 percent fruit juice (48 ounces or less plastic bottles), canned vegetables and fruits, enriched rice or pasta, iron rich and whole grain cereals, powdered milk. For more information, call: (925) 570-5654.

Lafayette Rotary Club Coat Drive

Every year the Lafayette Rotary Club is collecting gently used coats to donate to Shelter Inc. of Contra Costa. At a recent Rotary meeting Executive Director Timothy O'Keefe pointed out how important the Rotary coat drive is every year at the start of the cold season to serve many homeless community members with warm clothing. This year the club is inviting the community to bring gently used coats (adult or kids sizes) to the following locations in Lafayette: Blodgett's Abbey Carpet & Flooring, 3291 Mt Diablo Ct., Lafayette, and the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, 100 Lafayette Circle, Ste. 103, Lafayette.

Toy Drive for Needy or Homeless Children

Every year since Leslie DeWolf's daughter started Brownies/Girl Scouts, they have taken a barrel from the Bay Area Rescue Mission and asked a business to host it. "We have seen amazing generosity and felt the true joy of the season," she says. If you feel blessed and would like to bring happiness to a needy or homeless child this season, bring an unwrapped gift for a boy or girl of any age to Smile Tu, Inc., 2933 Ygnacio Valley Road in Walnut Creek.

Submit stories and story ideas to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com

How Many Colleges Should I Apply To?

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

This question ranks among the top five I get asked each admission cycle. Six college applications once seemed quite reasonable. Now eight is more commonplace and some students want to apply to 10 or more. When is enough, enough? The average college bound American high school student applies to just a few colleges, reflecting the fact that nearly 80 percent of colleges still accept about 80 percent of its applicants.

But in more affluent areas of the country, like our own Lamorinda communities, application numbers are soaring, sometimes reaching absurdly high submissions. Last year a student told me she planned to apply to 24 colleges, and wondered if I could review the list and assure her that she would get into at least one. She brought in the list and we carved it down to nine carefully selected schools, based on prioritized college factors that were most important to her and her parents. With a more focused list, this student was able to avoid burnout, research each college fully, and write strong, convincing es-

says driven by sincere interest in each college, rather than a scattershot approach and fear of rejection. She ultimately had a more successful outcome, with acceptances to five schools.

What accounts for this rapid escalation of applications in upper middle class communities? In part, the Common Application, a standardized online application used by over 500 member colleges has made applying to colleges easier. But, that's not the whole story. Since the great recession and unparalleled increases in college costs, families are applying to more institutions in the hopes of getting not only offers of admission, but scholarships to ease the financial burden as well. More middle and upper middle class families are simply unwilling (even if able) to pay the full sticker price for a 4-year undergraduate degree, and attempt to leverage their children's strong academic credentials to access merit aid. Even with this rational objective, applying to more schools does not automatically ensure a better outcome. Careful research is

needed to determine if each college awards merit aid (some only offer need-based aid), how many scholarships the student is actually eligible for and if the various awards can be combined. This is usually determined by the applicant's GPA and test scores, although there are numerous other important criteria that must be taken into account, depending on the family's unique circumstances.

Aside from pointing the finger at the ease of applying to colleges using the Common Application, the increased interest in merit aid, and the fear factor (Will I get into *any* college?), colleges themselves should be held accountable for the growing trend to send out more applications. Colleges are generally eager to convince more students to apply and many, perhaps most, work overtime to promote their institutions. Higher numbers of applicants result in lower admit rates, thus boosting a college's position in the national rankings. Students are bombarded with propaganda directed toward convincing them to apply – free, 'priority' appli-

cations, email spam, and sometimes even phone calls are used to seduce our children into believing that the colleges really want them, when, generally speaking, these efforts are aimed at increasing the numbers of applicants so schools can reject more of them. In an ironic twist, many schools are now lamenting the numbers of applications students submit, since the trend makes it harder on admission staff to distinguish kids who are genuinely interested in their institutions from those who are simply hitting the panic button. This, in turn, leads to decreased accuracy in the all-important yield predictions for the incoming freshman class. Colleges – be careful what you wish for.

Parents and their students are in charge of the number of applications they submit. My advice is to apply to eight, at most 10 (count the UC and CSU systems just once each) well researched colleges that fit your academic, social and financial criteria. Demonstrate consistent, sincere interest over time in each one and be done. It takes dedication and time to submit

a handful of strong college applications and remain a truly competitive applicant. In 12 years of counseling, I have yet to see that 'more is better' proven in college admissions.



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an independent college advisor who draws upon 25 years of higher education experience to help guide and support the college admissions process for students and their families. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC and HECA. She can be contacted at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com. Visit www.doingcollege.com for more information about her services.

Lynn's Top Five Time and Money Saving Holiday Ideas – With A Lot of Help From My Friends

By Lynn Ballou, CFP®

It's that time of year when we count our blessings. This year I was reminded of one of the best gifts a girl could have – really, really good friends. So for my last column of the year I asked some of my Lamorinda "besties" to share some of their cool holiday time and money saving ideas, great wit and wisdom with you.

Kjerstin Taylor-Rezendes: As my very first Lamorinda friend, Kjerstin has a special place in my heart. Not only is she mom to three of her own great young adults and a younger stepson, but she and husband Tom Rezendes own the very popular Nor-Cal Golf Academy in Walnut Creek. She shares, "Our holidays have changed dramatically over the years. One practice I developed early on was wrapping gifts immediately as they were purchased and kept a written list for each person so I didn't forget what I had purchased back in July! This put an end to those all-nighter Christmas Eve's with frantic wrapping and exhaustion in the morning. Of course, I have to admit that every year there is at least one present with the wrong name on it, but I think that is a 'tradition' accidentally inherited from my mom!"

Melissa Griggs: This amazing mom of four young men – including a set of twins – designs, remodels and builds homes that you would salivate over. She and one of her incredible homes has been featured in *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine. With a son successfully launched in New York City, one finishing up at Saint Mary's, two at University of Arizona, a home in Lafayette and a home in St. Helena, this is a gal with about three minutes of free time, in who knows what city and what day! Here's her share: "When putting away your holiday decorations, number the boxes in the order you want to unpack; lights get wrapped on a piece of cardboard so they don't tangle; and put together a small holiday tool set with wire, snips, extra lights, etc. This stays in the holiday box so it's right there when you need it!"

Linda Lahonta: My wonderful friend, Linda, and I have also known each other since our children were quite young. On top of running a very successful tax practice she has also launched two amazing young men. If anyone in my life ever embodied everything Christmas, well, it is definitely Linda. She and her husband, Keith, came up with this awesome idea that embodies the sheer survival of exhausted parents, along with much needed humor! "Our kids were not allowed to get out of bed until the bell rang, meaning Santa had just left. (One year we even scooped up deer poop from the lawn and put it on the carpet to prove the reindeer had also been there.) This meant we could

control the present opening time to a more reasonable 7 to 7:30 a.m. rather than 6 a.m. or earlier!"

Debi Murphy: As a pastor's wife (husband Kevin is the pastor of the Lutheran Church of Walnut Creek) Christmas is kind of the "family business." And of course as our director of operations, life at Ballou Plum is incredibly busy at this time of year. Debi says that what has kept her sane all these years is "to find joy in every situation and to let go of expectations and commit to staying cheerfully flexible!" Her share for this column is really to keep it simple. Rather than try to replicate a many course, huge sit-down feast she says, "I love simple comfort foods for the holidays! A big pot of chili or beef stew with cornbread are family favorites." Staying with the theme of keeping it simple, she adds: "My goal is to decorate for the holidays in one hour or less. What I remember about each holiday are the meaningful conversations and time spent with others and not how amazing (or not) my house looked!"

My own share: I'll close with this contribution which has stood the Ballou family in good stead over the years. My husband, John, and I started out our lives together with very little cash and there were many lean financial years as we built our future together. Our best selves came through in the annual hand crafted "coupon book" that we secretly created for each other. Later, as the kids grew, they too got caught up in the spirit of the "coupon book" when allowances fell a bit short of shopping reality. These fun coupons included everything from taking a chore on for a family member (such as washing the dishes) to more indulgent offerings like breakfast in bed. Recently I ran across an old coupon I hadn't cashed in yet for "Dinner and a

Movie" from my husband. Can't wait to redeem it over the holidays!

Wishing you a holiday full of fun, simple blessings, with those that matter most. Happy Holidays!



Lynn Ballou is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professional and co-owner of Ballou Plum Wealth Advisors, LLC, a Registered Investment Advisory (RIA) firm in Lafayette. Lynn is also a Registered Principal and Branch Manager with LPL Financial (LPL). The opinions voiced in this material are for general information only and not intended to provide specific advice or recommendation for any individual. Financial Planning offered through Ballou Plum Wealth Advisors, A Registered Investment Advisor and a separate entity. Securities offered through LPL Financial, member FINRA/SIPC.

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Inspiring Craft Cocktails and Spirits Ignite the Senses

By Susie Iventosch



FAIR Spirits Café Liqueur Bread Pudding

Photo Susie Iventosch

The craft cocktail Art of Mixology Contest hosted by the Orinda Arts Council in late October was a big success, according to Kal Deutsch, vice president of communications for the Arts Council.

"The event was great," Deutsch said. "The crowd was approximately 250, who braved a few sprinkles. We also had a blow-up screen to show the World Series."

According to Deutsch, the event had great feedback, so a second annual Craft Cocktail contest is likely!

"We had one request that we do one contest in the spring and one in the fall," Deutsch added.

The overall winner was Joe Cleveland from The Cooperage American Grill in Lafayette. He won first prize for The Perfect Pair, a combination of Rye Bourbon, St George Spicy Pear Liqueur, Tobacco Syrup and lemon Juice, topped with a hot mulled wine espuma (froth or foam). Second place winner, Ashley Myers from Forge Pizza in Danville, pleased the crowd with Fall's First Fire, a blend of Zaya rum, Drambuie, and a dash of cream with a Laphroaig rinse, all garnished with pumpkin spice gelato quenelles.

Third place, audience favorite and top amateur winners were Matty McGee from Flora Restaurant in Oakland, Rachael Kruse of Corners Tavern in Walnut Creek, and Amy Jeter of Moraga. Their creative concoctions were the Vesuvio Swizzle, the Drunk'n Pumpkin and the Call a Cab, respectively.

Myers' recipe is featured on this page, but you can visit the Orinda Arts Council website (see Info Box) and

gnac, France, but imported and distributed locally by Bay Pac Beverages out of Danville. The FAIR Spirits products are stocked at Moraga Wine & Spirits, Whole Foods and Jackson's Wine & Spirits in Lafayette. Currently, the line features Quinoa Vodka, Café Liqueur, and the brand new Belize Rum. The rum is sourced from fair trade sugar cane grown in Belize.

The quinoa for FAIR's vodka is sourced in Bolivia where FAIR works with a fair trade-certified growers' cooperative. The coop is comprised of 1,200 independent farmers. The quinoa is then shipped to France, where it is made through a single distillation process. The product is gluten-free, and was awarded 96 points from the Beverage Tasting Institute and received their Platinum Medal award in 2014.

The Café Liqueur, is made with coffee beans sourced in Vera Cruz,

Mexico and I suggest using it in coffee-flavored desserts, such as my coffee frozen yogurt mud pie, or this bread pudding from Cristian Molina, FAIR's brand ambassador at Bay Pac. (The mud pie recipe will be featured in the next issue!)

"I really am passionate about this

company and our commitment to fair trade," said Quasebarth. "We are so pleased to be bringing sustainable, socially-responsible, fair trade spirits into Northern California."

Please see the FAIR Café Liqueur bread pudding below. It makes a fun and festive holiday dessert!

Orinda Arts Council Mixology Winners:

<http://orindaarts.org/arts-news/art-mixology-winners>

FAIR Spirits: <http://www.fairspirits.com/>

Bay Pac Beverages: <http://www.bay-pac.com/>

Beverage Tasting Institute Award Description: http://www.tastings.com/search_spirits.lasso?se=k&kw=FAIR%20Quinoa%20vodka&sb=All&sf=ScoreForSort

Susie Iventosch is the author of Tax Bites and Tasty Morsels, which can be found at Across the Way in Moraga, www.amazon.com, and www.taxbites.net. Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. **This recipe can be found on our website:** www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.



Fall's First Fire

Recipe by Ashley Myers of Forge Pizza, Danville

INGREDIENTS

2 ounces Zaya Rum
2 ounces Drambuie
3 drops cherry bark bitters
Laphroaig rinse

DIRECTIONS

Use a small amount of Laphroaig to line the inside of a brandy snifter. Remove any excess scotch. Combine room temperature ingredients in a shaker and stir. Pour gently into rinsed snifter and garnish (on a spoon over the rim of the glass) with a pumpkin gelato quenelle. The relative warmth of the beverage should play nicely against the cold gelato. Sip your cocktail and taste the gelato alternately, letting the fresh pumpkin flavor calm the sweet spices of the cocktail.

Quenelles are beautiful football shaped scoops of any soft dessert item (or any food item for that matter). If this cocktail is served fresh with unlimited resources, a quenelle is its best accompaniment. I tried deep freezing quenelles at home in my conventional freezer to preserve their shape (Forge doesn't have a deep freeze!) and ended up scooping up the gelato with a tasting spoon instead. The flavor effect was the same, so if quenelle making isn't your thing, scoop some ice cream into a bowl and call it a day!

FAIR Spirits Café Liqueur Bread Pudding

INGREDIENTS

6 slices day-old baguette, cut into medium size chunks
2 eggs
¼ cup firmly-packed light brown sugar
2 ounces FAIR Café Liqueur
½ teaspoon cinnamon
Pinch of salt
1 ½ cups milk
½ cup evaporated milk
¼ cup raisins

DIRECTIONS

Lightly butter a 6-inch square baking dish. Spread the bread cubes in it. In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, brown sugar, Café Liqueur, cinnamon and salt until well blended. Pour the milk mixture over the bread cubes. Let stand, pressing down on the bread occasionally, until it is evenly soaked, about 20 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 350 degrees. Scatter the raisins evenly over the surface of the soaked bread and press to submerge the fruit. Set the baking dish in a large, shallow roasting pan. Add very hot tap water to the roasting pan to halfway up the sides of the bread pudding dish. Bake for about 20 to 25 minutes, or until a knife inserted comes out clean. Serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or gelato and top with ½ ounce of Café Liqueur. Susie's notes: I didn't have a 6-inch square baking dish, so I used two smaller dishes, more like 4-inches square. Also, I put the raisins in with the bread before adding the milk mixture and I used a mixture of bakery whole wheat bread and baguette pieces. And, finally, mine baked for closer to 30-25 minutes in the water bath.

The Tiptoes of Happiness

... continued from page B2

Simply entitled, "Leslie," the compilation CD was released in October by San Rafael's Access Music Records (www.accessmusicrecords.com), and features a compelling mix of classics – "Moon River" and "Still Dream," the uplifting spiritual, "I'll Fly Away," and even an operatic duet, "Con Te Partiro." The CD is being sold locally by Orinda Books and Orinda Hardware with individual selections available on iTunes – just in time for the holidays. Up next, O'Brien and Miller will record songs of empowerment to help listeners be their very best selves, and will then release a Christmas CD in two years.

It's an ambitious schedule. The entire process for "Leslie" took about four-and-a-half years, including a six-month break for Miller to tour nationwide with the Zac Brown Band. "It was a steep learning curve combined with a lesson in humility, but the whole thing just worked out really well for this time in my life," explains O'Brien. "I was able to record during the many mornings it took, and then be with my kids when they came home from school. And I was healthy the whole time – probably

because of all of the deep breathing I was doing."

Miller chose many of the songs to showcase O'Brien's unique, pure voice. "Terry has such amazing connections in the music industry. He wanted Tom Scott to play 'Autumn Leaves' and 'In the Wee Small Hours.'" A three-time Grammy Award-winning saxophonist, Scott has backed numerous jazz and popular singers over his long career, including Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Johnny Matthis.

O'Brien also weighed in, too, because she really wanted to share Kander and Ebb's, "A Quiet Thing" with the world. She loves the song's central message, and hopes it will resonate with listeners. "You think you know how your day will turn out, but then life happens. Things change. Then, one day, you look around and realize just how great your life is. Happiness really does come in on tiptoe."

To learn more and to purchase O'Brien's music, visit:

Leslie Darwin: <http://lesliesongs.com/>
iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/leslie/id946938908>

Share Your Celebrations and Remembrances

If you would like to share an announcement about a special event or achievement, such as a wedding, engagement, scholarship or graduation of a local resident, or about a special person from Lamorinda who has passed, send a photo along with your text (up to 250 words) to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com, and include "Celebrations and Remembrances" in the subject line.

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Lamorinda's Specialties of the House

The perfect gift of baked goods

By A.K. Carroll

It's the middle of December and the holiday pressure dial is on high. You're getting ready to knock out a seasonal book club, family brunch and an ugly sweater party all in one weekend. But what about the holiday bake sale? The Christmas cookie exchange? Snacks for the Snow Ball? Nibbles for New Year's Eve? No time to bake yourself, but looking for something with a little more sentiment than a frozen pie from Safeway? Look no further. Lamorinda's where it's at for bakery treats made with the same love and attention you'd give them yourself ... if you had the time.



Holiday sugar cookies
Photo courtesy SusieCakes

Two years and counting, **SusieCakes** of Lafayette may be the unexplored answer to your holiday treat needs. All of SusieCakes' baked goods are made from scratch in small batches each day. The decadent texture and flavor of their European-style buttercream frosting is sure to wow family and friends alike. General manager Lisa Roa recommends this season's pumpkin cheesecake or specialty carrot cake, filled with a praline pecan filling and topped with cream cheese frosting. SusieCakes also makes holiday frosted sugar cookies, bite-sized mini cupcakes and a chocolate candy cane cake with real crushed peppermint. Stop by their shop to select something sweet. SusieCakes is located at 3598 Mt.

Diablo Blvd. For information, call (925) 299-0210 or visit www.susiecakes.com/lafayette.

Don't let the name deceive you,



Sam's very messy cupcake, Republic of Cake
Photo provided

Orinda's **Republic of Cake** offers more than gingerbread Meyer lemon, chocolate peppermint, and almond cranberry cupcakes this holiday season. Owner Peter McNiff is also making traditional homemade pies served in flaky all-butter crusts. Pies vary from cranberry-apple to pumpkin custard to maple pecan, and can be ordered by phone or online. And if you're in a pinch for a purchase, there are always cupcakes. McNiff's favorite is Sam's Very Messy Cupcake, a special sweet treat with its own special story. Republic of Cake is located at 2 Theatre Square, Suite 151. For info, call (925) 254-3900 or go to www.republicofcake.com/orinda/index.html.

Moraga may have one of the East Bay's best-kept secrets in pastry artist Kitty Wong, two-year owner of **Kitty Wong's Pastry Shop**. Though Wong specializes in special occasion and wedding cakes, she can also whip up decorated sugar cookies, mini tartlettes, mini cream puffs, cake pops and maca-

rooms with flavors ranging from raspberry rose to cranberry orange to pomegranate and pumpkin spice. Her parents are currently digging her mini cheesecakes with cranberry orange sauce. Wong's products are an edible art to grace your holiday table. Check out Kitty Wong at www.kittywongpastry.com or call



Kitty pops from Kitty Wong's Pastry Shop
Photo provided

(925) 285-5812 for information.

Already had your fill of processed flour and refined sugar this holiday season? Looking to bring a goodie that is both good and good for you? Check out East Bay mama Sharon Girdlestone's **Lovely Little Cakes**, an independent business that produces baked goods with more delicious and less of everything else. "My stuff is usually focused on gluten-free, allergen-free and dye-free," said Girdlestone, who does a lot of baking for families and children. Whenever it's her turn to

bring treats, Girdlestone picks nut flour muffins, sweetened with raw honey or fruit and free of gluten and preservatives. "They always shock people," said Girdlestone, "and they're easy to do." Girdlestone also makes gluten-free, vegan and dairy-free pies. Though her baked goods come by order only, Girdlestone delivers for free. Check out **Lovely Little Cakes** at: www.lovelylittlecakes.net, or call (415) 730-7500. Nut flour muffins at: <http://www.mysustainabletable.com/meals>.

And if you're out for a meal and need a treat to take home, Lafayette's **Chow** has plenty of house-made pies and desserts. The assortment of 9-inch pies includes traditional pumpkin, southern pecan

and organic apple, as well as chocolate cream, coconut cream and butterscotch banana cream. If pie's not your thing, try Chow's famous ginger cake or organic apple-cranberry crisp. Chow also offers cookies by the dozen, including gingerbread men and holiday sugar cookies. They can even hook you up with whipping cream, ice cream, chocolate sauce or cookie icing if you're the sort who prefers to add the finishing touches yourself. Pick something up from Chow's Market, or order in advance. All orders require pre-payment and 48 hours notice. Chow is located at 53 Lafayette Circle, (925) 962-2469.

Check out their Christmas menu at <http://chowfoodbar.com/ChristmasMenu.pdf>.

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In Memory

Gordon Erspamer

July 24, 1953 – Nov. 7
Resident of Moraga



Gordon Paul Erspamer, age 61, passed away on Nov. 7 at his home in Moraga after a 9-month battle with brain cancer. He was born on July 24, 1953, in Ironwood, Mich., to E. Gordon Erspamer and Jean McDonnell Erspamer, the third of eight boys. He received his BA from Hamline College in 1975 and his JD from the


University of Michigan Law School in 1978. He met his future wife, Trish Bare, in law school and they moved to San Francisco in 1978.

Gordy began his legal career at the San Francisco firm of Steinhart & Falconer before moving to Morrison & Foerster in 1982, where he spent the next 30 years focusing on energy and intellectual property law. His passion and life's work, however, was his pro bono work on behalf of military veterans. Over the past 30 years, he spearheaded a series of lawsuits that brought about significant changes both in the law and in public opinion. Most recently, Gordy brought suit on behalf of soldiers used as guinea pigs in the testing of chemical and biological weapons at Edgewood Arsenal from 1943-1975. Gordy's tireless advocacy on behalf of veterans earned him extensive recognition during his lifetime, including being named Trial Lawyer of the Year by Trial Lawyers for Public Justice in 1992, the American Bar Association Pro Bono Publico award in 2009, the American Lawyer Magazine Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011 and the National Veterans Legal Service Program Outstanding Public Service Award in 2013.


Gordy was also an avid collector of Native American artifacts and art, an enthusiastic poet and photographer, and he spent many thousands of hours perfecting his cactus gardens at his Moraga home. He is survived by his wife of 32 years, Trish Bare; four children, Kevin (Jessica Fain), Kerry (Ben Ginsberg), Brian, and Brett; his mother, Jean; brothers Dave (Heidi), Mike, Paul, Roy, and Marty and many nieces, nephews and cousins. He was predeceased by his father E. Gordon Erspamer, his younger brother Peter and his oldest brother Dan.

No memorial service will be held as family and friends celebrated Gordy's life and accomplishments in July at the Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Gordy's name to Swords to Plowshares at www.swords-to-plowshares.org. The family wishes to thank their many friends who provided endless support during Gordy's illness, particularly Jim and Jody Balich and Rocky and Chris Unruh.

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ART

The Moraga Art Gallery's new show entitled "Waters of the Koi" highlights the bright, colorful abstract paintings of Heather Metcalf, and the exquisitely turned-wood platters, bowls and vases of Jacques Blumer. The show will run through Jan. 11, 2015. The gallery is open Wednesday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. For more info, visit www.moragaartgallery.com or call (925) 376-5407.

Valley Art Gallery "Artful Giving" runs through Dec. 23 at 1661 Botelho Drive, Walnut Creek, including the annual collection of beautiful fine art and crafts that make unique gifts for everyone on your list. Extended holiday hours. For info, visit valleyartgallery.org.

The Bancroft Library Gallery presents "California: Captured on Canvas" – an exhibit of 43 remarkable paintings from the library's collection highlighting the state's history and culture that have drawn people to California. The exhibit runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through March 6, 2015, UC Berkeley Campus, Doe Library Annex.

MUSIC

WomenSing, the adventurous East Bay women's chorus, offers a festive celebration of song accompanied by chimes and timpani – from traditional carols to Latin American spice at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 17 at St. Mary's College Chapel, Moraga. Cost: \$30 premium seats, \$25 general admission, \$20 seniors, \$10 students/youth 18 and under. Tickets online: www.womensing.org or at the door. WomenSing will be holding auditions for experienced singers for the continuing 2014-15 season on Tuesday, Jan. 6, or by appointment. New this season is the formation of the new WomenSing Ensemble, a small a cappella ensemble, selected from the larger WomenSing chorus. For info, email at audition@womensing.org, or visit website www.womensing.org.

An Evening of Jazz from 7 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 17 at the Orinda Library. Welcome winter with warm Brazilian jazz along with American standards. Mary D'Orazi brings her beautiful voice, rhythmic sensibility and thoughtful phrasing to her take on jazz, as well as a few holiday tunes. Tim Campbell on piano, and Greg German on drums/percussion. Free. Registration is not required.

Solo Opera is pleased to present Engelbert Humperdinck's masterpiece, "Hansel and Gretel," the second production in its 2014 Storybook Opera series. Throughout "Hansel and Gretel," there is a running theme of hunger and poverty. In order to tie this into the needs of the community, Solo Opera is asking the audience to bring a non-perishable food item to the shows to donate to the Food Bank. The show runs at 7 p.m. Dec. 19 and at 2 p.m. Dec. 20 at Del Valle Theatre, 1963 Tice Valley Blvd, Walnut Creek. Seating is reserved; group discounts are available. Tickets: \$25, youth 17 and under; \$35 seniors; \$40 adults. For tickets call (925) 943-7469 or visit the Leshar Center box office, or online at http://www.lesharartscenter.org/hansel-and-gretel/. For more info, visit www.SoloOpera.org.

THEATER

Synergy Theater is back with two fantastic shows for the month of December: "Backer's Audition" at 8 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 20 and "Spontaneous Combustion" on Sunday, Dec. 21 in The Big Room Theater at Lamorinda Music, 81 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette. For info, call (925) 408-8540 or visit www.SynergyTheater.com.

The holiday season at Town Hall Theatre is all about family and tra-

dition, and this season Town Hall brings the return of live radio plays with Joe Landry's adaptation of "It's a Wonderful Life." This production, directed by Diablo Actors' Ensemble's Managing Director Sam Fryer, tells the classic story made famous by the 1946 Frank Capra film but with live sound effects and incredibly talented voice actors who populate the town of Bedford Falls all in the style of a classic radio program. The show runs through Dec. 20. Visit the website for showtimes and ticket prices at www.TownHallTheatre.com.

The California Academy of Performing Arts presentation of "The Nutcracker" at the Campolindo Performing Arts Center Dec. 17-21. This family favorite is a feast for the eyes, filled with surprises and delights for all ages. The story is narrated as it unfolds, guiding young viewers through the beautiful ballet and making it much more enjoyable for little ones (and grown-ups) who might not be familiar with the timeless story of Clara and her magical Christmas Eve dream. This production is huge, with more than 100 local performers. Tickets for the general public (\$22) can be purchased at Eventbrite.com. For more info, visit www.capadance.net.

LECTURE & LITERATURE

Join Julia Scheeres, Berkeley resident and New York Times and London Times bestselling author as she discusses her latest book, "A Thousand Lives: The Untold Story of Jonestown" at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 15 as part of Sweet Thursday program at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. In this true life story of blind loyalty and daring escapes, of corrupted ideals and senseless, haunting loss, Scheeres follows the experiences of five Peoples Temple members who went to Jonestown. Vividly written and impossible to forget. Free.

OTHER

An Evening of Jazz from 7 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 17 at the Orinda Library. Welcome winter with warm Brazilian jazz along with American standards. Mary D'Orazi brings her beautiful voice, rhythmic sensibility and thoughtful phrasing to her take on jazz, as well as a few holiday tunes. Tim Campbell on piano, and Greg German on drums/percussion. Free. Registration is not required.

Temple Isaiah is thrilled to announce a Hanukkah celebration from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 18 at Walnut Creek on Ice located at Civic Park- 1375 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek. This event will feature a Hanukkah menorah candle-lighting, live Hanukkah music, traditional Jewish "sufganiyot" jelly donuts and festive chocolate Hanukkah "gelt" candy and dreidel giveaways for children. For more information visit www.temple-isaiah.org

Winter Solstice Ceremony Celebrating Lucina, Scandinavian Goddess of the Returning Light, Dark Moon in Sagittarius by Local Goddess Circle. Daughters of the Goddess, a Bay Area women-only Goddess Temple, will be holding its annual Winter Solstice Ritual from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 20. Location of East Bay address upon RSVP. Newcomers: \$15. Contact Leilani at (925) 787-9247 or email Leilani@DaughtersoftheGoddess.com for info, or visit www.DaughtersoftheGoddess.com.

Light up your home and heart with a new kitty. Community Concern For Cats invites you to visit its beautiful kittens and cats from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 20 and from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 21 at Pet Food Express in Lafayette, 3610 Mt. Diablo Blvd. For more info, go to www.communityconcernforcats.org.

Join the National Park Service for a free winter solstice-themed campfire program on Sunday, Dec. 21 at

John Muir National Historic Site (NHS) in Martinez. The program begins at 3 p.m. with crafts and games in the park orchards and continues with a campfire from 5 to 7 p.m. Rangers will lead the group in songs, stories and activities to celebrate the longest night of the year. No reservations are required. Meet at the front gate of the John Muir National Historic Site, 4202 Alhambra Avenue, in Martinez. Come with warm layers, picnic blankets, lawn chairs, marshmallows and a desire to have a good time. For info, visit www.nps.gov/jomu.

Saint Giles' Episcopal Church will be holding its annual Christmas Eve Nativity Service at 9 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 24 at Saint Mary's College Chapel, 1928 St. Mary's Road, Moraga. The service will include a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, Christmas carols, a Christmas homily by the Rev. Justin R. Cannon, and more. All are welcome to attend! For more info, visit www.stgiles-moraga.org.

St. Mark's United Methodist Church Christmas Eve Service at 4 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 24, 451 Moraga Way Orinda. Please come out and join us for a traditional service of lessons and carols. This year will feature music coordinator Christopher Giffen.

Registration is now open for the next series of Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) classes. They will be held at the Lafayette Community Center, 500 St. Mary's Road. Classes begin Jan. 13 and are held from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. every Tuesday night through Feb. 24. Classes are open to residents and employees of the Lamorinda area, as well as teenagers 16 and older with a parent. Classes are free, but there must be a commitment to attend all classes. Register online at www.lamorindacert.org.

5 Habits of Healthy Families Nutrition Workshop from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 13 at Lamorinda Music, 81 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette. Join an interactive workshop with Jill West, RD, author of the book "400 Moms" and a nutrition consultant in Lafayette. Cost: \$37. To register, visit http://www.400moms.com/workshop. For more info, email Jill@400moms.com.

GARDEN

The Lafayette Garden Club January meeting from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Jan. 1 in the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Hall, 3780 Mt. Diablo Blvd., will feature Gary Bogue speaking on the subject of "Garden Friends and Not-Such-Friends." Gary was curator at Lindsey Wildlife Museum and a long-time gardening and wildlife columnist for the Contra Costa Times. Now in "retirement," he is an author, lecturer, and friend to all who garden. Guests are welcome at this meeting.

The Walnut Creek Garden Club will hold its monthly meeting at 9:30 a.m. Monday, Jan. 12 at the Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Road, Walnut Creek. Tom Liggitt, a local, well-known rose breeder and co-president of the Contra Costa Rose Society will speak on heirloom varieties of fruits, vegetables, as well as roses. You do not need to be a gardener to join the WCGC. For info, contact mslittle44@gmail.com.

Worm Composting Bin Workshop from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Jan. 17 at Heather Farm Community Center in Walnut Creek. Learn about vermicomposting and build your worm bin. All supplies are covered, including worms. Cost: \$20 per household. Space is limited and registration is required by Jan. 9. Visit www.wastediversion.org to download registration form. Sponsored by the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority. For info, call (925) 906-1801.

MOVIE REVIEW

'The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies'

Holiday movies hit theatres this week

By Derek Zembrak

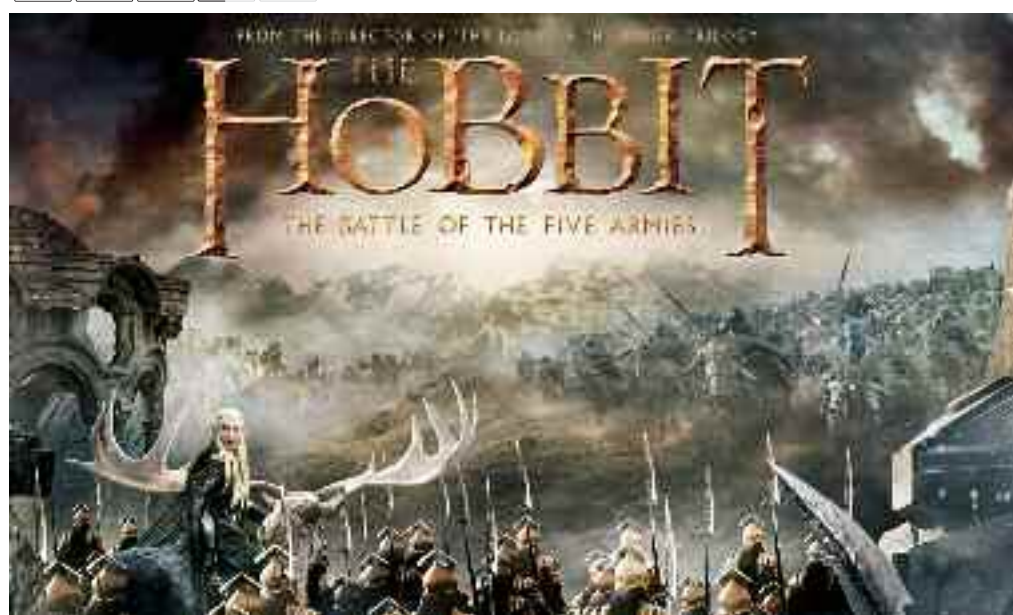


Photo courtesy Warner Bros. all rights reserved

The holiday season is now in full swing and as with many of us it is also Hollywood's busiest time of year. Lamorinda Theatres has a full schedule of holiday films this week, starting off with the highly anticipated and the defining chapter of the Hobbit franchise, "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies," on Wednesday, Dec. 17. As the title states it is a battle and the movie is much more action packed than the previous Hobbit films, "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey" and "The Desolation of Smaug." This time around, three-time Oscar winner, director Peter Jackson, keeps the audience on the edge of their seats from the opening scene through the 2 hours and 24 minutes of the movie.

The movie opens with the dragon, Smaug, going on a rampage, destroying the local village, causing mayhem among the people. I can confidently state, this was one of the most amazing visual effect scenes in Hollywood history. A "must see" on a big screen – the bigger the better.

Bilbo and company are forced to engage in a war against a collection of enemies to keep the terrifying Smaug from obtaining the Kingdom of Treasures and demolishing all of Middle-Earth. The film once again stars Martin Freeman (Bilbo), Ian McKellen (Gandalf), Cate Blanchett (Galadriel), Richard Armitage (Thorin), Orlando Bloom (Legolas) and Benedict Cumberbatch (Smaug). You can count on "The Hobbit: The

Battle of the Five Armies" to once again receive several Oscar nominations, in the technical categories, when the nominations are announced Jan. 15.

Another holiday movie will take place this Friday, Dec. 19, during the California Independent Film Festival Funder's Night at the Rheem Theatre. We will be showing a special screening of Animal Planet's first original TV movie "Hercules Saves Christmas," starring Hercules from Animal Planet's hit TV series "Pit Boss."

"Hercules Saves Christmas" takes us on a magical, fun-filled and touching journey. Max, an adorable yet mischievous 12-year-old boy meets a talking dog named Hercules who takes him to the North Pole to meet Santa and argue his way onto the "nice list." The movie was shot in 2012 in the Bay Area, including Orinda Theatre Square and the Orinda Theatre. The movie was produced by Shorty Rossi, Leonard Pirkle and myself, and stars newcomer Anthony Robinson as Max, who was nominated for a Young Artist Award in 2012 for the role in the movie. The movie also stars McKenzie Phillips ("One Day at a Time"), Marc McClure ("Back to the Future," "Superman"), Kathy Garver ("Family Affair") and George Mcquire as Santa Claus. Mcquire recently performed live at the Rheem Theatre in the stage play "Love Letters" to rave reviews. Leonard and I will both be attending the screening, which will include a

Q&A session. Refreshments will be served and tickets must be purchased in advance at the Lamorinda Theatre box office or online at www.lamorindatheatres.com.

Starting next week at the Orinda Theatre includes Disney's "Into the Woods" and "Unbroken." I would like to wish everyone a wonderful holiday season and an amazing 2015! See you at the concession stand!

Derek can be heard each Saturday morning at 8 a.m. on KEST 1450AM discussing movies and entertainment in the Bay Area.

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Service Clubs Announcements

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December 19:
Neuroscientist and opera singer, Dr. Indre Viskontas straddles the line between science and art. Her presentation is entitled "The Organized Mind"

January 9:
Jan Cushman and Gail Chesler from AAUW California will speak about "Tech Trek—Empowering Women For Over 130 Years"

We will not meet on December 26th or January 2nd – Happy Holidays!

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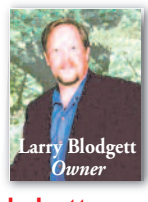


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Basketball Programs Look to Replace Graduated Talent

By Michael Sakoda



Photo provided



Photo Gint Federas

Tough preseason competition is getting the Lamorinda schools ready for an even tougher road through the DFAL.

Campolindo went 23-8 last year (11-1 DFAL), won another league title, but were bounced in the semifinals of both the NCS playoffs and the CIF tournament.

This year, the Cougars are off to a 4-1 start, beating Redwood, Escondido and Sacramento. They lost to Montgomery.

The Cougars lost All-League performers Andrew Zolintakis and Justin Dunn to graduation and have lost would-be senior guard Matt O'Reilly to another school.

"They were great players, but the guys who were backing them up last year [are] ready to step into this," said head coach Matt Watson.

Center Chris Hansen looks to be a force in the DFAL, while fellow seniors, Scott Chen, Sean Smith, and Austin Clarke will be on All-League radar.

Having won four of the last seven DFAL titles, there is a bit of tradition at Campolindo, but Watson wants his guys focused on improving now to prepare them for another deep post-season run.

"Obviously we want to win the league title, but we're concerned with getting better weekly," said Watson. "We have a lot of tough games that we lined up to try and challenge our players early, so hopefully come March we're going to be playoff ready."

Acalanes finished last season 17-13 (5-7 DFAL) and were ousted by eventual champion, Bishop O'Dowd in the semifinals of the NCS playoffs. In the CIF tournament, they were upset 46-60 by Christian Brothers in the first round.

Off to a 0-4 start, the Dons have lost to Montgomery, Redwood, McClymonds and Drake. They will continue to face tough competition in St. Mary's of Stockton and Analy this preseason.

Standouts Buster Souza and Matt Thomas graduated last year, and this year's team returns only one starter, Joey Hewitt.

"It's a very light class," said head coach Dave Goldman simply.

The Dons are looking to some new faces this year, adding the football teams' quarterback Casey Harrington, track star Calvin Sariby, and Boston University committed baseball player Zach Stromberg to the starting lineup.

The team also returns reserves Alex Kinnear, Andrew McKendall, and Ryan Cheng.

"It will take a little time to build chemistry," said Goldman. "We're very, very inexperienced, but we're athletic; we'll defend aggressively, and we're trying to improve to the point where we can be competitive in league, and squeeze into NCS."

Miramonte notched an 18-13 record a year ago (6-6 DFAL), were bounced by Campolindo in the second round of the NCS playoffs, and

by eventual Nor-Cal Champion Drake in the semifinals of the CIF tournament.

The Mats lost their two best players to graduation, Drew Anderson and Joey Goodreault.

"The short answer is you don't replace players like Drew and Joey," said head coach Drew McDonald.

Anderson averaged 31.6 points, 18.3 rebounds per game during the team's CIF run, and Goodreault's ability as a playmaker and leader will be sorely missed. Forward Ray Clark, a leader on the team, also graduated last year.

Miramonte returns starters Jackson Wegener, who earned All-DFAL Honorable Mention last year, and Jake Linares, as well as key reserve Moneer Mujaddidi. Look for juniors Eddie Ionescu and Ryan Anderson, as well as sophomore Charlie Hawking to become factors as the season continues.

"With this group, where they end up is going to be in large part how

much they improve and come together as a team," said McDonald. "Hopefully by the time league comes we'll be ready to compete."

At 4-1, the Mats will wrap up the preseason in a few tournaments.



Jackson Wegener Photo provided

Girls Hoops Preview

Mats face tough competition, Dons improved

By Conrad Bassett



Photo Gint Federas

With the preseason well underway, the Lamorinda girls' basketball programs look ready for the DFAL season.

Last year, the **Mats** finished with a 30-2 record behind an experienced squad. This year, the Mats have to replace several key contributors, including the graduated Bree Alford, Alison Miller, and Megan Reid.

Head coach Kelly Sopak certainly has some outstanding players—the only senior and co-captain Kaitlin Fenn returns as do juniors Sabrina Ionescu, Keana Delos Santos, Jessica Wilson and Uriah Howard along with sophomore Rachelle Louie.

The Matadors are playing a challenging schedule. "We always try to put together a very competitive schedule. This season we are challenging ourselves at every turn in the non-league," Sopak said.

They won their first tournament of the season in Marin County beating perennial power St. Mary's in the final game.

The team traveled to Hawaii last week for the Nike Iolani Classic, where they lost their first game 63-62 against Konawaena (Hawaii) before beating Shenzen (China) 74-62 and Roosevelt (Honolulu) 73-38.

Sopak is not as focused on wins and losses. "If we measure our success by wins and losses we might not have a successful season. ... However, if we measure our success on our improvement and where we eventually finish we just might have a highly successful season."

Over in Lafayette, the **Acalanes** Dons have already played extremely well under second-year varsity coach Chad Wellon. After struggling last year, finishing the season with an 11-15 record, the Dons are using their experience to improve. With a 6-0 start, the Dons are well on their way.

"Last year we had virtually no varsity experience so getting that year of experience under our belt has gone a long way in helping our team's confidence," Wellon said.

Wellon returns key players junior Julia Lyons and sophomores Emma Godfrey and Roni Marrone. Sophomore Brooke Panfilii has transferred from Campolindo.

"Everyone on the team is contributing right now. We can go deep into our bench and get a lot of production," Wellon added.

The team's biggest win came in the championship game at the Lincoln Mustang Tournament in San Francisco against Amador Valley

(Pleasanton). Lyons was named the Most Valuable Player at that tournament. On Dec. 13, they won an overtime game at Sonoma Valley 48-47 with Godfrey scoring 21.

The Dons host the Lady Don Classic from Dec. 17-20, where they look to extend their win streak.

Art Thoms begins his second season at the helm at **Campolindo**. Campo went 17-12 a year ago with an 8-4 DFAL record.

"Kaylyn Murray is our lone returning starter and was an Honorable Mention All-League player last season," said Thoms. "We will rely on her to anchor the middle of court at center."

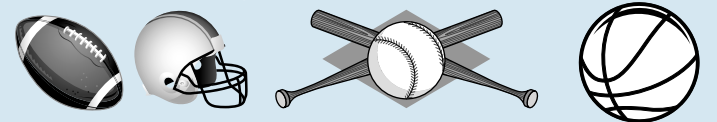
Thoms also expects senior Ashley Dubrasich to play a key role this season. "I have very high expectations for her this season," he explained.

The team has struggled early, losing four of their first five. However, Thoms has seen some significant improvement in their play, including wins in their last two games, one a 62-23 defeat of Drake.

Campolindo will face San Leandro and Oakland Tech before playing in the West Coast Jamboree.

All coaches agreed that the entire DFAL will be a solid league again this year. The DFAL begins on Jan. 6.

Youth Sports Registration



Lamorinda Rugby Football Club



On-line Registration opens Oct 1st for the 2015 rugby season! Season runs December through March for youth, and through April for HS. All ages welcome. Girls welcome through age 11. No prior rugby experience necessary. Practices are located at the Wilder Fields in Orinda.

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To the State Finals!

By Michael Sakoda



Jack Shurtz had a key fumble recovery in the NCS championship game.

Photos Gint Federas

The Campolindo Cougars (15-0) are one win away from a Division III State Championship as they'll continue their incredible season Saturday at the Stubhub Center in Carson, Calif.

Campolindo took the NCS crown on Dec. 6, edging Marin Catholic, 27-21, on the strength of a late fumble recovery by senior linebacker Jack Shurtz.

The Cougars faced the bigger, well-rested, also unbeaten Sutter High School in the CIF Northern Regional Division III Championship on Dec. 13.

Sutter (13-1) had not played since Nov. 29, and their fresh legs showed in the first half. The Huskies came out hot, going on a nine-play, 65-yard touchdown drive to start the game.

Sutter's size showed early, too, as the Cougars' offense was stymied through much of the first quarter. Campo was forced to punt on their first two possessions, and on their third, Jack Stephen's threw an interception that set up Sutter's next touchdown.

"Jack got off to a rough start and he just kept fighting," said Campo head coach Kevin Macy. "We had to

do a lot of switching what we were doing on offense to get him a little more comfortable."

Trailing 14-0, Campo dug in its heels and went to the air. Max Flower caught two passes for 69 yards on a seven play drive capped by an Adam Remotto touchdown reception.

On their next possession, Campo's offense was the beneficiary of a 9-yard punt, and the Cougars capitalized. Facing a third-and-nine from the 18-yard line, Stephens threaded the needle, finding Remotto between two Sutter defenders for his second score of the night.

Minutes later, Campo forced another punt and took over from their own 28-yard line. On first down, Stephens threw a bomb to Caleb Whalen who took it 72 yards for a touchdown, and a Matt Blair extra point gave them a 21-14 lead.

Sutter threatened late in the first half, moving the ball 45 yards downfield, but on second down from Campo's 20-yard line, Huskies quarterback Randy Post threw for the end-zone only to find Campolindo defensive back Tiger Garcia for one of his two interceptions.

The Cougars took the opening

kick of the second half, scored on a 4-yard scamper from Nick Fadelli, took a 28-14 lead, and never looked back, beating Sutter 35-14.

Once again, it was Campo's defense putting on a show. They blanked Sutter in the final 36 minutes of play, their front seven putting all kinds of pressure on Post, drawing penalties and allowing their secondary to make plays.

"Whatever we were earlier in the year, an offensive team, I think our personality has changed," said Macy. "It was a big night for our defense. We're so worn down and beat-up; it's



Jack Stephens and Chase Abbott

just playing with determination and grit at this point."

Notable among Campo's injuries are those to Max Flower (shoulder) and Connor McNally (groin), which didn't seem to be issues on Saturday as Flower caught for 140 yards, and McNally rushed for 31 yards and a touchdown. Stephens threw for 283 yards, three touchdowns and an interception, while Fadelli managed 50 yards and a touchdown on 16 carries. Campolindo heads to the Divi-

sion III Championship in Carson this Saturday to take on El Capitan of Lakeside, the No. 16 team in California, whose size and athleticism the Cougars will look to overcome with one last touch of the magic that's carried them all year. Kickoff is at noon on Dec. 20.

"Our kids battle. They buy us time to figure our way back into a game," said Macy. "Our team definition changes week to week. Who knows what we'll be [this] week."

National Recognition

Submitted by Becca DuPont



Photo provided

Campolindo's Tyler Petite was selected to participate on USA Football's 2015 U.S. U19 National Team. The team will face Team Canada on Feb. 7 at Maverick Stadium at the University of Texas at Arlington.

A 6-5, 230-pound tight end, Petite has verbally committed to play for Duke. He has caught 19 touchdowns in three seasons for Campolindo High School. Petite followed a 495-yard, nine-touchdown junior season with 782 yards and eight touchdowns this year.



Photo Gint Federas

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Boys' Soccer Looks to Rebuild in Open DFAL

By Spencer Silva

The 2014-15 soccer season is underway and the landscape of the DFAL has changed considerably. The Lamorinda boys' soccer programs have lost key players and will look to rebuild.

Campolindo (4-2, 1-1-0 league) dominated the DFAL last fall, earning first place with a 9-0-3 record in league play. Their strong season earned them the No. 2 seed in the NCS tournament. They made it all the way to the semifinals before losing to eventual champions, Dublin High.

Much has changed in the past year, however, as the Cougars graduated 16 seniors and lost two of their best players in Ryan Donat and Preston Kilwien to the De Anza Force Academy. Donat was the DFAL's MVP during 2013-14 and led the team in scoring with nine goals. Playing for De Anza, Donat and Kilwien, both juniors, are ineligible to compete for a high school team.

The other key loss is Michael Samaniego, who will miss the season due to an injury. Samaniego was First Team All-League last season and was expected to be an important veteran presence and defensive force on the pitch.

"We lost 20 players from last year's team. That's unheard of in soccer," said coach Shane Carney of his fresh-faced team. "I believe we can still be a good this year, but it's going to take a lot of work."

The team returns just three starters from last year's squad: Seth Kofman, Jeremy Raine and Jacob Buchannan. Of his veterans, Carney intoned, "Their leadership will be important in bringing this team together and pushing the team to succeed."

The team is off to a strong start, only suffering losses to Livermore (5-0) and Dublin High (3-4-1). They also placed third in this year's Winter Soccer Classic defeating Albany last weekend 1-0.

Acalanes (2-3-1, 1-0-1) is also in

the process of adapting to new personnel. They graduated Kaj Simonsen, last season's DFAL offensive MVP. Eight of the team's 22 players are underclassmen, and it will be up to seniors Eric Sirott and Pat Ramm, both All-League selections last season, to lead the team into DFAL contention.

Coach Paul Curtis enters his 16th season at the helm of the program and emphasizes how every year it takes time for teams to meld together.

"Unlike other sports," he explained, "in high school soccer, the kids only play together for three months. They play on different teams throughout the year, so it takes some time getting comfortable with each other."

Despite a losing record, coach Curtis has a positive outlook on his team's progress.

"So far the team is learning how to work together," Curtis said, "We're developing the ability to attack consistently and learning how to possess the ball."

Miramonte (1-1-2, 1-1) had a tough 2013-14 season, finishing 4-7-5 (1-6-4 DFAL).

They graduated two of their best players in Kyle Visher and Ruwan Thilakaratne. The team has 11 new players, including three freshman and eight players promoted from last year's junior varsity squad. Reece Roberts and Joseph Wang, both All-League Honorable Mentions, return to the team.

In spite of the new faces, coach Billal Samy believes the team will be competitive throughout the season. "We're dealing with a new team dynamic," Samy explained, "but the returning core of the group will help expedite our collective form. We expect to be competitive."

Miramonte and Campolindo meet for the first time at Campolindo on Dec. 19. Acalanes hosts defending NCS champion Dublin on Dec. 17.



Acalanes

Photos Gint Fedaras



Campolindo



Miramonte

Acalanes Girls' Soccer Team Sets the Pace as Season Gets Underway

By Karl Buscheck

The girls' soccer season has only just begun, but the DFAL has an early frontrunner.

Acalanes is pouring in goals. Through the first five games the squad has found the back of the net on 30 occasions.

"They're taking chances and they're definitely clicking," said head coach Evan Sassano. "We have a lot of options, but playing together as a team is going to be the thing."

So far, the team's top option has been Katharine Torchio, who has racked up six strikes. The senior has helped lead the Dons, who own a 2-0-0 record in league (5-0-0 overall), to a share of first place in the DFAL standings.

On Dec. 10, Acalanes cruised past Las Lomas 4-1 to open league play with a big road win. The team followed up with a 1-0 away win over Dougherty Valley on Dec. 12. Torchio provided the game-winning goal in the second half.

It's been an impressive start for a team that went 0-4-8 in league a season ago. While Sassano cautions that it's still extremely early, he likes the direction his team is headed.

"Obviously, just like any other team I'm sure [our goal] is to win league and win the playoffs. This program hasn't won a championship yet, so we definitely think that's something to shoot for and something that we want to accomplish," he explained.

The **Miramonte** girls' team knows all about winning. Last year, the Mats rolled to a 10-1-1 record in league (15-3-1 overall). The squad claimed first place in DFAL.

This year, the team is 1-2-0 overall and tied for third place in league

with a 1-1-0 record. On Dec. 5, Miramonte lost 3-2 to Piedmont in the team's only non-league game of the season. Sophomore Mia Grillo and freshman Angeline Liu each scored a goal in the defeat.

The Mats dropped the first game of DFAL action, losing 3-0 at Alhambra on Dec. 10.

Miramonte bounced back from that defeat by going out on the road and shutting out Dublin 5-0 on Dec. 12. The Mats had four goals in a second-half onslaught and junior Cecilia Gee collected a hat trick.

Miramonte is slated to host **Campolindo** on Dec. 19 in the first rivalry matchup of the season. The game pits the top DFAL teams from a season ago against each other. Campolindo head coach Ernesto Silva knows that the clash with the Mats will be just one of many challenging tests that his team faces this season.

"I don't believe there will be one dominant team. Every game in our league will be tough," he said.

With a 1-1-0 record in DFAL (3-2-0 overall), Campolindo is tied with Miramonte for third place in the league standings. On Dec. 10, the Cougars won their first league game of the season, getting past Dublin 1-0. Senior AJ Morgan provided the decisive strike in the home win.

Campolindo then fell 1-0 at Alhambra in a road matchup on Dec. 12. Silva predicts an upswing for the Cougars as the team spends more time training and playing together.

"Given that we had very little time to prepare due to club commitments for several of our players, we have had some solid performances early on," he explained. "I believe we will continue to improve."



Acalanes

Photos Gint Fedaras



Campolindo

Submit stories to sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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LAMORINDA SPORTS

Winner, Winner, Turkey Dinner

Submitted by Mike Valerio



From left, front row: Leah Sopak, Lauren Kobashigawa, Lauren Frechman, Lauren Westergren; back row: coach Brian Frechman, Kate Carter, Scarlett McCullough, Mikaela Valerio, Kate Brown, coach Mike Valerio and Scot Kobashigawa; not pictured: Jordan Pratt and Elle Skvarna

St. Perpetua's seventh grade American team took first place for the 7th/8th grade division in the MVP Flight Thanksgiving Tournament on Nov. 30. The team defeated St. Joan of Arc, St. Agnes and St. Perpetua's eight grade national team.

CYO Turkey Tournament Winners

Submitted by Brian Roesch



From left: Tyler Bullock, Doug Ellery, Justin Myers, Ben Kang, Grant Roesch, Blake Webster, Sam Whipple and Dylan Rusconi; back row: coach Mike Bullock

Saint Monica's fourth grade CYO team won the Turkey Shootout Tournament with an undefeated record. Coming in as the underdog, the Spartans battled through three tough teams to claim the top spot on Nov. 30.

Fastest of Them All

Submitted by Jessica Soto



Ginny Vazquez-Azpiri Photo provided

Ginny Vazquez-Azpiri of Orinda Aquatics was the 10U girls high point winner at the Pacific Region Junior Olympics Swimming Championship held Dec. 5-7. Vazquez-Azpiri won six individual events and recorded the fastest time in the United States this year for her age group in the 100-meter individual medley.

Two other Orinda Aquatics swimmers were also high point winners, Ashleen O'Brien for 14U girls and Max Costello Cruz for 12U boys. Costello Cruz also broke the Pacific Region record in the 100-meter butterfly.

Orinda Aquatics placed second out of 48 teams at the championship.

Comeback Kids

Submitted by Laura Limson



Back row, from left: Coaches John Breznikar and Steve Dutto; middle row: Luke Lamison, Matthew Radell, Bradley Nestal, Joe Gonzales, Caden Breznikar and Donovan Davidson; front row: Tyler Dutto, Ben Murphy, Trent Larson-Deak

The Santa Maria CYO 11U American boys' team had a comeback victory, beating St. Perpetua in overtime to become the 2014 Turkey Shootout Champions.

Top Tier Tennis Team

Submitted by Pascale Siu



Front row, from left: Kristin Rosenbaum, Hilary Leutenecker, Stephanie Yee, Darlet Lin, Kay Sander, Laura Kim; back row: Andrea O'Brien, Ellie Kann, Janet Absher, Robin Rudolph, Marcy Sharafian, Pascale Siu, Jessie Thomas, Jennifer Glass

Lamorinda women from local tennis clubs combined to compete in USTA 40+ 4.0 league this season and took third place that the USTA National Championships.

The team earned the chance to represent Northern California in the 2014 National Championships held at Omni Rancho Las Palmas Resort in Rancho Mirage, Calif. on Nov. 7-9 after beating out 171 other NorCal teams.

During the first two days at Nationals, the team won a round robin to make it to the Final Four. In the semifinals, the team had three

match points in a third set tie-breaker to advance to the finals, but ultimately lost to Oregon 3-2. Playing New England for third place, Andrea O'Brien, Jessie Thomas, Darlet Lin and Stephanie Yee won to pull out a final team victory.

"This fantastic group of ladies (and great friends) trained so hard. It was super fun to compete at Nationals together and to watch the players' hard work pay off. It was a great team effort," said captain Yee.

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Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 08 Issue 21 Wednesday, December 17, 2014



O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum

...read on page D9

Signature Trees Speak for Themselves

Lone trees or a collection can define a home's personality

By Chris Lavin

While many homeowners take painstaking care to keep their lawns and properties in top curb-appeal condition – or at least make every attempt to keep them that way – sometimes it's the lone tree that takes charge, calls us to attention, and alerts us to its spectacular presence. The house itself is secondary. These are “signature trees,” trees that define their landscape, put the house in perspective.

Like seeing the splash from a Japanese maple that could not possibly be that true to the color red and simply must have been painted on by the fire department, trees can create the “wow” effect like nothing else in the front of a home. Gone are the yard ornaments, the trimmed lawn, the potted azalea or the wreaths on the door. The tree stands alone.

“The decision to plant a particular tree is really important,” says Geoff Olmstead, the nursery manager for Orchard Nursery in Lafayette, who has helped hundreds of Lamorindans make the right decision. “It can make a huge difference in how your house looks, how to present your house to others.”

Walk back into the nursery with Olmstead and one starts to get barraged by Latin names that don't help someone who doesn't know a *borealis* from a *gigantum*. (Those probably aren't even trees.) That doesn't deter Olmstead, though, because he is capable of quickly changing to regular-person-speak.

“So first, how big would you want it to get?” he asks. When told, let's say, about 100 feet, he throws back his head and laughs loudly. “Really? I



A Japanese maple brightens up the exterior of this home.

Photo Jennifer Wake

don't think too many trees get that tall, not even oaks. Redwoods will. People think they want redwoods but they don't really want redwoods.”

Which of course leads a person who is still amazed that the spell-check on the computer accepted “borealis” to an obvious question for Mr.

Olmstead: Why not? (She means, *sequoia sempervirens*, two of only two Latin words she knows, is just about the most spectacular tree ever to take root in Lamorindan soil.) Who could argue with a coast redwood?

... continued on page D4





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Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

City	Last reported:	LOWEST AMOUNT:	HIGHEST AMOUNT:
LAFAYETTE	6	\$667,500	\$1,000,000
MORAGA	10	\$310,000	\$1,460,000
ORINDA	8	\$765,000	\$1,810,000

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

- 1003 Carol Lane, \$667,500, 5 Bdrms, 1785 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 10-31-14
- 1808 Del Rey Street, \$1,000,000, 3 Bdrms, 1716 SqFt, 1961 YrBlt, 11-12-14;
Previous Sale: \$517,000, 01-24-03
- 20 Huston Court, \$810,000, 5 Bdrms, 2567 SqFt, 1978 YrBlt, 11-5-14;
Previous Sale: \$540,000, 08-30-01
- 1509 Huston Road, \$755,500, 2 Bdrms, 1523 SqFt, 1974 YrBlt, 10-31-14;
Previous Sale: \$655,000, 06-28-04
- 952 Janet Lane, \$765,000, 3 Bdrms, 1827 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 11-6-14;
Previous Sale: \$43,000, 10-07-71
- 1050 Stuart Street, \$865,000, 2932 SqFt, 1942 YrBlt, 10-31-14;
Previous Sale: \$960,000, 10-31-06

MORAGA

- 1997 Ascot Drive #4, \$585,000, 3 Bdrms, 1728 SqFt, 1975 YrBlt, 10-31-14; P
Previous Sale: \$503,000, 05-21-09
- 1967 Ascot Drive #A, \$310,000, 2 Bdrms, 964 SqFt, 1971 YrBlt, 11-5-14

... continued on page D5



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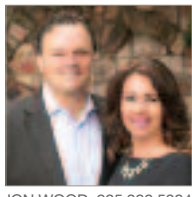
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Signature Trees Speak for Themselves

... continued from page D1



Erach Tarapore rakes his leaves on Michael Lane in Lafayette. He has taken care of his Modesto ash for more than 30 years.

“People think they’re evergreen, that they’re going to be low maintenance,” Olmstead says. “They’re like the ...” And he is obviously resisting using more Latin, so like the good people-person he is, he changes tack and goes back to English. “Redwoods are not low-maintenance,” he reports.

For one, redwoods shed their leaves, too. Sure, some people call them needles but they amount to the same thing. Trees have to be maintained. They can’t be planted somewhere under dubious soil circumstances and then fall down, say, and kill somebody. They can’t wiggle their roots into other people’s water pipes or sewage systems. People who plant trees have responsibilities, Olmstead says: They have to keep them healthy, clean up after them, and be responsible for them when they’re young, care for them as they mature. It begins to feel as if one is talking to a sex education counselor about responsible parenting.

So what do you plant if you want that magical effect?

“You start with how big,” he says, going back to the beginning, then he takes a big breath and his eyes almost start to well up. His passion for trees becomes obvious. “Deciduous trees are probably the best bet. You get everything with deciduous. Spectacular spring blossoms, bright green in the summer with shade, than fall color. You really can’t beat deciduous trees.”

Some people will plant collections, Olmstead explains. Like birches, in sets of three, “for faith, hope and charity.” And yes, he says, you have to rake the leaves. You have to watch out for the fruits that fall, which can be tedious to get rid of, especially when they’re knarly, like sycamores and others. Yes, you have to water it, preferably with a drip system that’s slow and deep off and on for a year or two – he will give you the amounts and times and everything else – and yes, they aren’t that pretty in the wintertime. But, he adds, “it’s winter.”

Still, the time comes to pay for the spectacular presentation of a nice tree. Erach



A beautiful oak on Burton Drive in Lafayette doesn't have to define a single house - it defines the whole neighborhood.

Photos Chris Lavin

Tapore of Michael Lane in Lafayette was found recently raking leaves quickly and dumping them into giant bags to get ready for an incoming storm. When asked why he bothered with a tree he had to care for, his face lit up: “This is a Modesto ash! They are beautiful trees, planted all along here,” he says, motioning up the lane. He has cared for his tree for more than 30 years, he says, and feels as if he has a relationship with it. He has it pruned every five to 10 years, and worries a bit about the mistletoe that’s taken hold high in its branches. He doesn’t mind doing the raking.

“I had to do it,” says Tarapore, holding his rake. “The tree will say, ‘I see you!’ And I know I have to do something. This is what I have to do today.”



Trees don't have to define the house. They also can provide swings with a needed branch.

Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

...continued from Page D2

MORAGA ... continued

- 113 Brookline Street, \$975,000, 3 Bdrms, 3424 SqFt, 1983 YrBlt, 10-31-14;
Previous Sale: \$850,000, 12-05-02
- 863 Camino Ricardo, \$1,250,000, 4 Bdrms, 2083 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 11-12-14;
Previous Sale: \$841,000, 10-08-04
- 67 Corte Yolanda, \$960,000, 3 Bdrms, 1894 SqFt, 1969 YrBlt, 11-13-14
- 1058 Larch Avenue, \$785,000, 2 Bdrms, 1232 SqFt, 1948 YrBlt, 11-4-14
- 18 Lynch Court, \$785,000, 3 Bdrms, 1656 SqFt, 1959 YrBlt, 11-14-14
- 651 Moraga Road #18, \$325,000, 2 Bdrms, 1144 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 11-12-14;
Previous Sale: \$36,500, 04-15-75
- 21 Williams Drive, \$1,460,000, 5 Bdrms, 2988 SqFt, 1985 YrBlt, 11-6-14;
Previous Sale: \$1,220,000, 08-31-04
- 431 Woodminster Drive, \$589,000, 3 Bdrms, 1800 SqFt, 1974 YrBlt, 11-13-14;
Previous Sale: \$269,000, 07-15-99

ORINDA

- 109 Bear Ridge Trail, \$1,810,000, 4 Bdrms, 3863 SqFt, 1988 YrBlt, 11-5-14
- 69 Coral Drive, \$1,245,000, 3 Bdrms, 1905 SqFt, 1960 YrBlt, 11-3-14;
Previous Sale: \$1,125,000, 10-24-06
- 5 Estates Drive, \$1,285,000, 4 Bdrms, 2630 SqFt, 1948 YrBlt, 11-6-14;
Previous Sale: \$1,250,000, 08-01-08
- 23 Hillcrest Drive, \$765,000, 3 Bdrms, 1290 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 10-31-14
- 20 Jack Tree Knoll, \$1,492,000, 11-10-14
- 35 La Cuesta Road, \$1,555,000, 3 Bdrms, 2468 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 11-12-14;
Previous Sale: \$1,076,000, 03-23-06
- 2 Loma Linda Court, \$1,200,000, 3 Bdrms, 2040 SqFt, 1952 YrBlt, 11-6-14;
Previous Sale: \$342,500, 05-17-91
- 31 Oakwood Road, \$1,250,000, 3 Bdrms, 2561 SqFt, 1949 YrBlt, 11-13-14;
Previous Sale: \$475,000, 06-27-97

Patti Camras

I believe in the art of living well.

Happy Holidays



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Stylish Solutions

Last Minute Holiday Décor Ideas

By Ann McDonald



We're nearing the holiday finish line. But just as we start to run through it, have you ever had this happen? You are feeling all warm and cozy and then your friend or spouse utters these words "we should..." followed by an off the cuff invitation to host a last minute get together at your home. No problem, you say. It all sounds fabulous when you have sugarplums in your head, but then you arrive home and realize you never quite pulled the holiday décor together.

Suddenly the tree is looking more Charlie Brown than Pottery Barn, the dining table is strewn with holiday cards and your kitchen/family room looks more like a shopping bag factory than an inviting space to host friends.

What to do? First, don't panic. You don't have to redecorate or spend \$5,000 with overnight shipping from a luxury holiday store to get ready inside of 72 hours.

Here are my top tricks to get you, the stylish suburbanite, on track fast.

1) DO: Think outside the box. Take a deep breath and remember, if you are headed out last minute for supplies, the traditional holiday product shelves may well be barren. A chipped Santa or painted wooden snowman is not exactly couture level decorating. Use the lack of choices to your advantage and stay true to your home's current color scheme. Purchase beautiful accessory items you can use all year with ease. Think sets of pretty glasses, pots or planters that match your home, silver anything.

2) DON'T: Reinvent the wheel. Remember, the reason we decorate our homes for the holiday season is to bless, not to impress. That means if we love something someone else has done and it blesses us with beauty, that is enough. At market a few months ago, I sourced topiaries that were stunning, expensive and made to order. For my own home, they were not practical financially or from a time standpoint. What did I do? I separated the elements as inspiration and created my own.

My team and I gathered planters and pots I already owned (we call it shed shopping), purchased faux boxwood balls with battery operated lights and went to the back yard to find striking oversized tree twigs which we used instead of antlers.



We used carpet squares with mirrors laid flat, shredded holiday cards, and a soft basket filled with the same type of shredding to hold the buffet silverware and a candle with glass hurricane.

Photos Couture Chateau





These displays we sourced for a client were out of budget range for me this season in my own home. To duplicate the type, I purchased faux box-wood balls with battery operated lights and then added dried twigs instead of the antlers and placed them in blue and white planters we use all year. Simple, elegant and very cost effective.



Happy Holidays!



Paul & Virginia Ratto

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*Warmest wishes for a
Happy Holiday
and a Happy Healthy 2015.*



Valerie Durantini

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Stylish Solutions

Last Minute Holiday Décor Ideas

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3) DO: Use items that work year round. One holiday vignette was created with an eye towards re-use once the season was over. Because we were on a tight budget, we headed straight for Ikea. First stop? The carpet section. I often use carpet squares or Ikat rugs as placemats and runners to achieve a luxury look for less on dining tables, entry hall consoles and even in overscale powder rooms with large counters. Every element is multi-purpose and non-holiday specific. It was a massive hit. Fresh, fast and talk about budget friendly.

When you are battling holiday overload and really do need to ready your spaces, give yourself permission to wander the aisles of stores you can escape in for inspiration. I will set aside up to 90 minutes, identify the need (holder for silverware) not the product (a silverware holder) and start to wander. For this project, the light bulb went off in the bathroom accessories area when we saw a pretty display holding towels. The soft baskets looked like chunky white sweaters. Very on trend. Because we identified the need, our mind was open to different solutions.

Here are a few of my favorite closing thoughts:

* I prefer faux to real when purchasing boxwood and moss unless you have a large budget and are OK executing repairs.

* The time honored wreath can be laid flat on a table to surround hurricane candles.

* The dried tree branch is the best free staple around. I use them raw, embellish with glitter, spray paint and even bejewel them for clients. Place a dried tree branch in vase with playground sand for weight bearing. Make certain the vase won't crack from pressure. Hang simple ornaments from the branches. Uplight for drama.

Have a blessed holiday and I will see you in the New Year!

If you need help with your decorating project, visit <http://www.couturechateau.com> or give us a call at (925) 386-0720. Happy holidays and Happy New Year!



Ann McDonald, IIDA, NAPO, is the Founder/CEO of Couture Chateau, a luxury interior design firm in Orinda. For a complete blog post including photos of different guest hosting ideas, visit www.couturechateau.com/blog.

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O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum

By Cynthia Brian

"Christmas trees come very close to exceeding nature." ~Andy Rooney



A modern Currier and Ives cozy Christmas living room. Photos Cynthia Brian

When my children were youngsters, cutting a tree was the big event of the season. We'd don our Santa hats, grab a bundle of rope to tie the tree to the top of the car, put film in the camera, and off we'd go, singing Christmas carols while plotting our adventure. It could take hours walking through a farm, checking out tree after tree, debating the merits of each. Sometimes we'd visit two or three farms before finding the perfect one. Afterwards, at home with our freshly cut treasure, we'd light a fire, drink hot cocoa and eggnog, eat persimmon pudding and Italian panetone, put on the Christmas music, and dance around the house as we spruced the fir with popcorn and cranberry strings, homemade ornaments, tinsel, and of course, plenty of twinkling lights.

One day my son had the bright idea that we should grow our own Christmas trees in order to have a never-ending supply of Yuletide enchantment. With the best planting season for evergreens between January and March, as soon as the small containers of conifers went on sale for \$1 post holiday, we nabbed 20 for our forthcoming

Christmas tree farm. We chose a prime spot at the top of our hill, prepared the plot, cleared the weeds, planted the seedlings, protected them with wire from marauding munchers, maintained soil moisture, and waited. The kids were very attentive to their trees. By year three, pruning and shaping the trees into conical forms began. Who knew that "Christmas trees" didn't automatically grow into perfect Christmas specimens? By year 7, they cut their first glorious imperfect tree and by year 13 all of the trunks were too large for any tree holder. Instead of cutting another tree, we potted a large Norfolk pine, added it to our entrance, where this oxygen producing, carbon dioxide absorber has served as our beloved *arbre de Noel*.

History, legend, or a combination of the two chronicles the tales of 16th century Germans bringing evergreens into their homes as holiday decor after Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, witnessed the stars sparkling through the forest trees and cut a tree to enjoy indoors. In 1848, Christmas trees are as significant to American culture as apple pie. But it wasn't until 1848 that Puritanical America embraced the idea of the "pagan" Christmas tree. The ever-popular Queen Victoria and her German Prince Albert were sketched with their children gathered around a decorated Christmas tree and East Coast society adopted this new fashionable trend. Currier and Ives jumped on the bucolic family festivity bandwagon by immortalizing vintage America in historic lithographs of cozy Christmas scenes including sleigh rides, crackling fires, candlelit chapels, snowmen, and tree decorating.

... continued on page D10



Tagged and wired Christmas trees fill a garden center.



Decorating a winter garden as a Christmas wonderland.

Photos Cynthia Brian

O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum

... continued from page D9



Trees are wrapped in wire for transit, then added to stands at the lots.

Yet, the love of winter evergreens was celebrated long before the arrival of Christianity. In ancient Egypt, the sun god Ra was honored on the longest night of the year, Dec. 21, and the shortest day, Dec. 22 with palm frond decorations to symbolize life over death. The Romans marked the solstice with evergreen boughs in anticipation of a prosperous spring. The Druids used greens as symbols of eternal life while the Vikings believed that evergreens were the chosen trees of their sun god, Balder.

With the advent of electricity, Thomas Edison presented the possibility of twinkling tree lights without as much fire danger from branch-tied candles. Europeans preferred small trees of 4 feet; Americans sought plants that would reach the ceiling. Decorations in

the early days included strands of nuts, berries, apples, and popcorn. Today, a fortune can be spent on accessories and unique ornaments fit for a king from hand-carved Nativity scenes to hand-blown glass angels.

When to buy, cut, and trim the tree varies from country to country. Many American families get into the December spirit immediately following Thanksgiving while many Europeans wait until Christmas Eve to launch their rituals. Evergreen garlands, boughs, ivy, mistletoe, wreaths, poinsettias, and holly join the enticing kitchen aromas of gingerbread, marzipan, and hot mulled wine, making our Christmas castles merry and bright.

Grown in all 50 states, Christmas tree farming is big business, although it is mostly small farmers who do the growing, planting as many as 2,000 trees per acre. Seventy-seven million trees are planted annually as American consumers purchase approximately 30 million farm grown trees valued at more than \$1 billion. Fresh trees (to me the only way to play) outsell artificial trees three to one. Young families who are starting their own traditions often prefer to “cut their own” at a Christmas tree farm, enjoying a day in search of the perfect tannenbaum, as our family did in years past.

As you banish the blues with the greens of a pine, fir, spruce, redwood, cedar, or cypress, you’ll be rewarded with the fresh fragrance of the wild woods. Remember to keep your cut tree watered as most farmed trees are chopped down in October or early November, then trucked to the retailer. While they won’t dry out outdoors, once indoors, your specimen will need a quart to a gallon of water per day depending on the size.

This year, whether your tree was grown on a plantation or in your backyard, bring the botanical brilliance of a live tree into your seasonal festivities and celebrate the magic.

*O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us!*

Wishing you seasonal sparkle; glow forth and enjoy being home for the holidays.



A bright red poinsettia will always signal the holidays.



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WINTER TIPS

Cleaning and thinning your trees may reduce the potential storm hazards without compromising the shade. In some situations the risk of failure cannot be reduced without removal of branches. Remember that healthy structurally sound trees are generally wind fast even when mature.

Storm damage is usually, but not always, related to structural problems that could have been addressed with proper structural training when the tree was young. Co dominant (two trunks with a narrow angle of attachment) trunks account for many trees failures. The hazard of wind damage is higher on the regrowth of trees that have been “topped”.

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Cynthia Brian's Mid-Month Reminders

COOK with either fresh or dried herbs. You'll need more when you use fresh. Dried are more potent. For every tablespoon of fresh herbs in a recipe, substitute 1 teaspoon of dried.

CREATE a stunning DIY holiday table arrangement using a combination of ornamental cabbage, lilies, evergreen branches, white roses, and pinecones.

LOOKING for a last minute gift that will be unique and useful? Check out your local garden retailers for holiday ideas, including a pot of drought resistant kalanchoe or a Christmas cactus in bloom.

TRIM low hanging branches of redwoods, pines, firs, and other evergreens to use in wreaths, garlands, and holiday ornamentation.

CARE for your land and your land will care of you. Our good earth is Mother Nature's Christmas gift to us.

Happy gardening, happy growing, fa la la la!



Christmas cactus begins to bloom.



Cynthia Brian and her favorite ladies under the tree.

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