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A colorful male Hooded Merganser duck and three females head upwind in search of small fry at the golf course in Moraga.

Photo Chris Lavin

## Fancy Hats Are For the Birds

Winter bird watching in Lamorinda

By Chris Lavin

It used to be, about 100 years ago, that the great egret in the Lamorinda area was targeted for shooting. Its plumage, especially in particular its wide-spreading tail that opens into a magnificent fan (in breeding season, which starts here soon) meant that hanging out at the area around the Moraga Creek and golf course, the Lafayette Reservoir, the San Pablo Reservoir in Orinda, and elsewhere, made for ripe plumage, and curtains for

the bird, which got shot and plucked. Fancy hats awaited as far off as New York.

"It turned out that it was almost an extinction," said Cindy Margulis, the executive director of the Golden Gate Audubon Society, about the birds' plight. "Their entire line could have died out."

Thanks in part to federal legislation that outlawed its slaughter,

the egret has survived, and is thriving now throughout Lamorinda. Its smaller cousin, the snowy egret, seems to be doing well, too, Margulis said. "Egrets are fascinating because they are designated as a migratory bird, but they don't always migrate," she said. "That's the case a lot around here." She said that global warming is keeping more birds around the area that would usually fly south for the winter.

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## One-Year Reprieve for Rheem Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Photo A. Scheck

Over the holidays a new Rheem Theatre drama unfolded. By mid-December Derek Zemrak and Leonard Pirkle, the present operators

of the business, thought the theater would close, but Zemrak exacted a final agreement on Christmas Eve, securing one more year for the historic theater. The property is still for sale, however, and the long-term survival of the theater is not secured. The new Moraga Community Foundation will step up in 2016 to support the local cultural asset.

Rumors began among local cinema lovers in the last weeks of December, with closure dates of the Rheem Theatre circulating within the community. "When Mahesh Puri proposed a new lease for just one year with unsustainable conditions for us, we decided we would have to close by January," said Zemrak. When he told the studios that the theater would close by the end of January, their response was that they would stop sup-

plying movies by Jan. 13. The community once again braced for the potential loss of the theater.

But Zemrak did not give up. He and Pirkle also manage the Orinda Theatre, and they run the California Independent Film Festival in both locations – as well as at the Castro in San Francisco. And they have invested a lot at the Rheem, adding new seats, three digital projectors, and the Classic Film Hall of Fame and Museum that includes Zemrak's lifelong collection of cinema memorabilia. They returned to the negotiating table.

"Mahesh Puri and I came to a 12-month agreement on Christmas Eve morning," said Zemrak. The theater has been on a month-to-month lease for the past 18 months, and Zemrak has been working with Puri to secure

a longer-term lease. "The Rheem Theatre will remain open through 2016. This 12-month extension will give the Moraga Community Foundation more time to develop a long-term plan for the Rheem Theatre. A great holiday gift for the Lamorinda area."

"Since last summer we were hoping that the operator would be able to sign a lease agreement and the Rheem Theatre could stay open while a long-term solution could be found," said Andy Scheck for the foundation. "The Moraga Community Foundation has finished the setup process and is waiting for the approval from the IRS on its nonprofit status. We are looking forward to working with the community and raising money that will help secure the future of the Rheem Theatre."