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## Two local groups look to revitalize Moraga from the ground up

By Sophie Braccini



Teresa Onoda addresses the We Will women.

Photo Sophie Braccini

intersecting with what Viva Moraga wants to achieve.

Amy Schofield, who is on Viva Moraga's steering committee, says that the group plans to hold a flash Moraga event at a different business location every month all summer long.

People there discussed the coming of the microbrewery at the intersection of Canyon and School Street with Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kathe Nelson, and rejoiced about the opening of a new nail salon. "It is all about being positive," said Maura Wolf, one of the Viva Moraga founders. She went to describe the three goals of the flash gatherings: to build a sense of community; to support the local business they are excited about, such as Tangelo; and to update people on the town's upcoming planning activities. Louis Kao the owner of the future Noodle Theory in Moraga was there to answer questions about his future menu (see his story on page A12).

On the side of the plaza, Wolf tied a long string for people to attach colorful pieces of paper listing their wishes for Moraga. The thoughts were wide-ranging in style and scope. One read: "A place to creatively collaborate with solo-entrepreneurs." Others said, "More things for kids," "No car driving during after-school time," "More fast food joints," and "Better public transportation."

This is where the two groups converged, gathering similar desires and energies coming from residents from all walks of life.

In the private home in the Bluffs, the women came at the invitation of Vice Mayor Teresa Onoda, Cherie Grant, Darlene Bennett and Kristin Kurth-Koelzer. Onoda started talking to the group about the positive, fun women in Moraga who want to make the town a better place to live, love and be happy. "We are embracing the arts and hope to buy the orange bench at the library, not to take a stand but to have a seat at the table, and to have others sit with us," she said.

The women started listing what Moraga means to them on a board that had been prepared to take notes, and what they would want for the future, discussing topics way beyond the arts.

Different generations of women were present and their desires for the town reflected it. Referring to Manteca, some suggested creating recreation facilities in Moraga that would attract patrons from the region. When Onoda noted that there was not much flat vacant land in Moraga, one of the bold women did not hesitate to propose flattening one of the shopping centers and transforming the land use completely.

Ideas of creating an incubator for Saint Mary's students were shared along with a general desire to make Moraga more of a college town.

Since We Will wants to move quickly into action, the women decided to establish a wish list and start making it happen. Several members of Viva Moraga are also engaged in We Will. People interested in following that group's activities should contact Cherie Grant at grant.cherie@gmail.com. The best way to follow Viva Moraga is to join its Facebook page.

One might call it serendipity, others a convergence of perception. Two groups have recently taken off in Moraga with different strategies, but a common goal: the revitalization of Moraga. "We Will" started as a women-led movement to purchase sculptures to beautify the town, while Viva Moraga was created to advocate for economic, community, and commercial development. In a town where divisiveness has been flourishing, these two groups declare and practice a positive and constructive attitude.

On May 18 both parties met in different parts of town for two different events. Viva Moraga organized its first "Moraga Flash" at Tangelo in the Rheem Shopping Center, a spontaneous gathering at a local business to show support. While this was going on, approximately 30 women from We Will gathered in the Bluffs to discuss buying the orange bench on lease by the artist in front of the library. The discussion quickly moved to other topics,

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