



MORAGA

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Moraga employees win county-wide walking challenge

By Vera Kochan

The Municipal Pooling Authority, which provides workers' compensation insurance and liability coverage to municipal employees, held its first ever Fall Walking Challenge 2023,

which spanned the month of October and was officially over on Oct. 31. Of the 14 Contra Costa teams that participated, 10 employees from the small but mighty town of Moraga came in first place with 322,334 average steps per day. Orinda came in second with 294,958 and Lafayette placed fifth with 246,865.

On an individual basis, Moraga Police Department Support Services Coordinator Cathy Ghiselli came in first place, out of 385 participants, with a month-long total of 913,352 steps (29,463 average steps per day).

According to MPA Administrative Program Coordinator (and point of contact for the Wellness Program) Azalea Wylie, several of their members were interested in participating in some type of walking challenge. With the blessing from MPA Chief Administrative Officer Linda Cox, the event had its first trial run with only Martinez taking part by using the Pacer app. The initial at-

tempt was a success, and any feedback from Martinez proved invaluable to incorporating the Walking Challenge into the Wellness Program.

"The idea behind the Walking Challenge is to encourage healthy movement with your team/co-workers," explained Wylie. "You work with your team to earn the most steps, competing against the other members who are participating. In the end, the goal is to build a new walking habit by way of some friendly competition. Research shows that something as simple as walking more often can help not only your physical well-being but also your mental well-being."

Participants' steps were recorded through the Pacer app and were automatically averaged. Top walker, Ghiselli received a Fitbit, while Team Moraga will receive a yet to be determined mystery prize, and each team member will also receive a certificate and an Iron Flask Sports Water Bottle

of their choosing. The town will receive a plaque, and of course, bragging rights.

Besides Ghiselli, Team Moraga included: Senior Maintenance Worker Jose Limon, Engineer Technician/Inspector Justin Jerome, Part Time Accounting Technician Steven Thomason, MPD Officer Fabiola Hernandez, Public Works Senior Administrative Assistant Jeanet Lara, Town Manager Scott Mitnick, Planning Director Afshan Hamid, Assistant Planner Alistair Fortson, and Senior Accountant Sylvia Wells.

"Cathy, in our Police Department, deserves the most ink and attention," stated Mitnick. "She was the lead 'walker' and organizer for Team Moraga. This may seem like a silly thing that MPA does to promote healthy employees, reduce sick leave usage, and lower operating costs. However, it really does serve to make our employees aware of their lifestyle and personal health. It also helps to promote teamwork and bring our em-

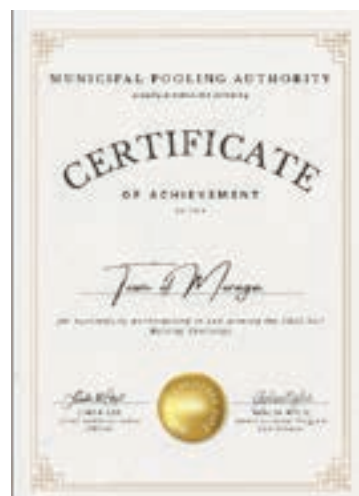


Photo courtesy Municipal Pooling Authority

Certificate awarded to the town for winning Fall Walking Challenge 2023

ployees closer together." Mitnick added, "It should be mentioned that by lowering use of sick leave due to having healthy employees, we are able to provide our taxpayers higher levels of service at a lower cost."

"The Fall Walking Challenge had such a great turnout," said Wylie. "We will be hosting another walking challenge in April 2024."

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Author Dan Hanel discusses local history at MHS event

By Vera Kochan

Award-winning mystery novel author Dan Hanel offered insight into some of the local history of Contra Costa County during his Nov. 5 presentation for the Moraga Historical Soci-

ety's speaker event at the Hacienda de las Flores.

Hanel's historical mystery series, "In the Shadow of Diablo," has earned him accolades as the "2019 Next Generation Indie Book Award Winner for Best Series." The fact that his fictional main character is a science teacher comes as no surprise in that Hanel has personally received the "Eukel Teacher Trust Award for Outstanding Teachers of Contra Costa County," in addition to being named "Distinguished High School Science Teacher for the State of California."

The Brentwood resident's four novels combine fact with fiction while bringing to life heavily researched, historical locations near Mt. Diablo and weaving a past/present storyline. Hanel's first novel, "Mystery of the Great Stone House," is based on Brentwood's John Marsh, who with no actual credentials, became California's first doctor and first American settler in Contra Costa County. After amassing a fortune from crops, ranching, and the fur trade, Marsh built his 7,000 square foot stone mansion. His brutal murder in 1856, prompted his long-lost son, Charles, on a quest spanning a decade to bring the killers to justice.

Marsh's daughter, Alice, by a second marriage, was responsible for the naming of Orinda. While married to Oakland's William Camron, their land purchase was named Orinda Park after Alice's favorite, 17th century, English poet Katherine Fowler Philips, also known as, The Matchless Orinda. Rumors of a fortune in hidden gold help to drive this novel's plotline.

Hanel's second novel, "Death at the Healing Waters," explores the west coast's most famous 1920s resort called Byron Hot Springs. Built on hot springs and salt flats, the hotel was originally constructed to provide people with the oppor-

tunity to "partake of the healing waters", which were advertised as a cure-all for a variety of medical issues. As its popularity grew, the rich and famous of the day came for a relaxing and restorative getaway. The fact that the location was so remote, prohibition never came knocking on its door. When the Great Depression took a toll on everyone's wallet, the resort eventually became the Army's Camp Tracy during WWII and was converted into a secret interrogation center for Japanese and German Naval officers. At the center of this novel's intrigue is a missing, legendary 137 carat diamond.

"Ghosts of Black Diamond," Hanel's third novel, refers to the Black Diamond Coal Mine near Antioch. Thanks to the population boom of the Bay Area in the 1800s, coal was considered a valuable commodity in its day. Founded by Noah Norton, the town of Nortonville sprouted up near the mines in order to house the workers and their families. It was populated by mostly Welsh immigrants, some of which belonged to a secret society based on ancient philosophy and mystic symbolism with ties to medieval legends such as King Arthur. These symbols can be found on many of the headstones in the adjacent Rose Hill Cemetery. Sarah Norton, Noah's wife, was the town's midwife who attended over 600 cases without losing one. She died at the age of 68 in a runaway buggy accident while en route to a birthing. Known as the White Witch, it is said that her spirit haunts Rose Hill Cemetery.

Hanel's latest novel, "Beneath the Tangled Vines," involves Contra Costa County's once burgeoning wine industry. By 1904, there were dozens of vineyards and wineries dotting the land surrounding Mt. Diablo. Martinez, Clayton, and Pleasant Hill, among so many more, added to the wine indus-

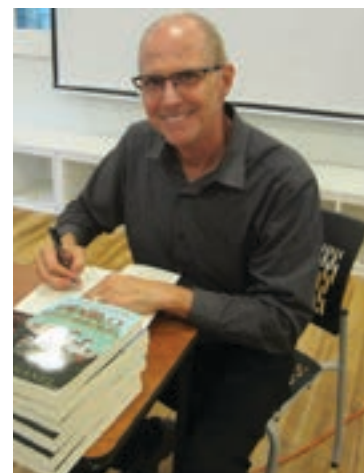


Photo Vera Kochan

Historical mystery author, Dan Hanel, signs his books

try with their plentifully producing vineyards. San Francisco was a mecca of wine warehouses, counting at least 27 until the 1906 Earthquake destroyed all but one with fires that were fueled by the alcohol within. The California Wine Association, which held a virtual monopoly over the industry, decided to consolidate and move to Point Molate in Richmond to build Winehaven -- the largest winery in the world.

Not to be left out of the wine business, Saint Mary's College had moved from San Francisco, to Oakland, and eventually to its present location of Moraga, and under the name Christian Brothers began its altar wine production at a vineyard they named Villa de La Salle in Martinez. It was a small money-making hobby until they realized that the wine was so good they decided to move Christian Brothers to Napa in order to step up production for commercial purposes.

"Beneath the Tangled Vines" contains mysteries that revolve around Chinese immigrants and secret underground tunnels; a cryptic message in a peculiar bone box; and a fortune in missing wine.

For more information about Dan Hanel visit: danhanel.com.

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