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Un, Deux, Trois—Voilà!

By Linda U. Foley



Philippe Chevalier

Photos Linda U. Foley

A squall of small tables, ambient lighting, a glowing Cherry wood bar, and French waiter greet us on a recent Wednesday night. ‘Duo Gadgo,’ a French American couple from Moraga, plays traditional chansons. A sense of de ja vu makes me feel as though I’m in a bistro at the Rive Gauche... minus the smoke and the Seine beyond the windows.

This is Chef Philippe Chevalier’s first foray into running his own restaurant. His route to this point is layered with impressive haute cuisine experiences.

Born into a fishing family in the Vendee Region of France, Chevalier entered the culinary world in his early teens and by age 27 had earned the distinction of Executive Chef. His career path wound

through the Michelin-studded venues of Paris (Maison Prunier), St. Tropez, St. Berthelemy, and the French West Indies. In 2002, he was ready to tickle the palettes across the ocean as Executive Chef at Le Salamandre in Danville. Just a year later, Diablo Magazine recognized him as the Best Chef of Bay Area restaurants. In 2004, his “chefing” at prestigious Chez Papa in San Francisco, resulted in the recognition of the Best French/European Restaurant in San Francisco by the Examiner.

Chevalier Restaurant is barely seven months old and is getting its legs. Though the restaurant is small and prone to being noisy, it feels comfortable and the wait staff is efficient and pleasant.

Eric Lacombe, from Montpellier in the south of France, is one of

just two waiters tending to a full house. While Eric allows me to sample one wine, the other waiter notices my camera and offers to take a picture mid-stride.

I choose a glass of Stone Street Chardonnay at \$14 from an extensive wine list and it is good once it has “warmed up” a bit.

The menu—nearly as large as our table—brims with largely Provençal-inspired classics such as onion soup, oysters, escargot, foie gras, mussels, charcuterie and coq au vin. For something less French, there is pork from Iowa, Hawaiian Ahi tuna, Colorado lamb and homemade gnocci.

There are daily specials such as Bouillabaisse and traditional Casoulet.

We decide on escargot, salad

with mustard dressing, Sole Almandine and Rabbit in Cream Sauce, followed by warm apple tart. The rabbit was velvety like a young happy chicken, the vegetables fresh and cooked to a light crunch and the tart apples were perfect on the light and crispy tart.

Chevalier—which translates into Knight—is more like a king in his narrow galley-style kitchen as well as the perfect host as he checks on his guests to assure that they are happy.

Though Chevalier is on the pricey side, the food and ambience make it worth to enjoying a small and perfect piece of France right in our backyard.

Bon appetit and au revoir!

Chevalier Restaurant
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MOFD Rejects LAFCO Report Findings

By Andrea A. Firth

“I am very proud of our accomplishments with our revenue stream,” stated Fire Chief Pete Nowicki when addressing the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Board at their meeting on March 4th. “We have pre-eminent service abilities and capabilities as compared to other Districts in the area.” While Nowicki was very pleased with the MOFD’s level of fire service, he was less than pleased with the characterizations of the District and the recommendations outlined in the Municipal Service Review (MSR) recently issued by Contra Costa County’s Local Agency Formation Commission, known as LAFCO.

What are LAFCO, MSR, and SOI?

LAFCO is a regulatory agency charged with discouraging urban sprawl and encouraging the orderly formation and development of local agencies, such as fire districts. About every five years, LAFCO compiles a Municipal Service Review (MSR)—a comprehensive study designed to better inform LAFCO, local agencies, and the community about their municipal services and how effectively they are being delivered. The MSR provides a detailed overview and history of the agency and evaluates a number of aspects of service delivery including growth and population projections for the area, facility capacity, and the financial stability of the agency. LAFCO is also responsible to determine and update the agency’s Sphere of Influence (SOI)—the physical boundaries and service area of a local agency.

Nowicki’s Problems with the MSR.

Nowicki found the report to be riddled with inaccuracies, discrepancies and unfair representa-

tions. As an example, he explained that the MSR, which was prepared by the Los Angeles-based Burr Consulting firm, referred to the MOFD as an urban area (the categorization is based on population density).

He would challenge that much of the MOFD coverage area is suburban or even rural, as in the case with Canyon, a significant factor when evaluating fire service delivery.

Nowicki strongly objected to the report’s statement “the District did not identify cost-savings measures to economize on expenses.” He pointed out that the MOFD regularly reviews their financial position, conducts audits, and generates an annual report. He indicated that he planned to ask LAFCO remove this statement.

What the Others Had to Say.

Gordon Nathan, a former Moraga Fire Commissioner and a member of the MOFD Board from 1997-2006, was troubled by the presentation of the report. “The whole thing kind of bothers me. It sounds like somebody got to [the consultant] and outlined what was important to them.” He questioned how the consultant came to the conclusions and recommendations outlined, and encouraged the Fire Chief to point to the District’s strategic plan in his response to LAFCO. Specifically, Gordon challenged the report’s SOI options that suggested the possible detachment of the City of Orinda from the District or annexation of the MOFD to ConFire. “This is diametrically opposed to what the voters in Orinda and Moraga chose in 1997,” stated Gordon.

Richard Olsen, a former Moraga Fire Commissioner for 12 years

who was a strong advocate for the creation of the MOFD, outlined his problems with the MSR to the Board. Olsen had attended the LAFCO meeting when the consulting firm presented the MSR. He was not impressed with the consultant’s report or presentation and felt that fire service was not her area of expertise. Olsen particularly found fault with the use of cost per capita when evaluating and comparing fire service finances and believes there were many flaws in the methodology utilized in the MSR. “When people try to use that metric [cost per capita] they do not understand fire service,” stated Olsen.

Art Haigh, an Orinda resident and a former member of Orinda’s Revenue Enhancement Task Force (the Task Force submitted its final report to the Orinda City Council in December) also addressed the Board. He acknowledged that the per capita comparison had been disputed in the Task Force’s report as well, but he challenged the Board to investigate whether the District can do its work more efficiently and get the costs down. “The question is are we getting our money’s worth for the services given,” stated Haigh.

What Next? The MOFD Board members unanimously agreed that the MSR did not accurately characterize the District and that the recommendations were problematic. Nowicki and the Board plan to file a written response to LAFCO specifically outlining the areas of the MSR that they feel require revision. Director John Wyro will present an ad hoc committee report regarding LAFCO at the March 18th Board meeting.

Spectacular Inauguration for Moraga’s New Postmaster

... continued from page 3

The US Marine Corp was there for the Presentation of the Colors, five local Girl Scouts led the Pledge of Allegiance and representatives from the Town joined the Post Office administration in welcoming Kreisel.

The crowd of about 100 people was composed of Moraga residents, Postmasters from about 20 other jurisdictions, employees, union members, friends and family. Moraga postal employees had prepared everything, from the decorations in

the hall to the generous buffet.

The most interesting aspect of the event might have been the testimony of the Post Office employees themselves. Kreisel has been serving as Postmaster for a few months already, and staff representative Perlita Gray said, “Since Cina arrived, we have felt a flow of renewal. Her energy and commitment have revitalized our office.”

“We are working under a lot of pressure,” said Kreisel, “some

employees have retired and won’t be replaced, so motivation and excellence is what I need to focus on.” She explained that since she doesn’t have funds to reward her hard working staff she sometimes comes on Saturday mornings to cook pancakes for them.

This appreciative attitude and the fact that she does not hesitate to work any station herself whenever needed, make the new Postmaster both popular and efficient.

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