New App Creates Smooth Ride for Lamorinda Casual Carpoolers

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By Sophie Braccini



Commuter Kevin Newby uses a new casual carpool service to get a ride into San Francisco as Alex Mooradian and Photo Sophie Braccini Zach Burghardt make sure everything is OK.

mind standing in the cold for a few minutes at the Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church parking lot in Orinda recently before hopping in cars that were heading across the bay. These Moraga and Orinda residents are pioneering a new service through an app called Commutr that guarantees riders and drivers they'll find matches in 10 minutes or less on their morning commute to San Francisco. After a few hiccups in its first when they had difficulty matching week before the holidays, Commutr is now up and running, and developers are already thinking of expanding to new locations.

"This is better than BART," says Laurie Tennant from Orinda. "You can't get parking after 7:30 at BART, the drop spot is closer to my office (she works south of Market), and it's nice to have a guaranteed seat!" Other commuters were equally enthusiastic about the service. Moraga resident Jon Waide says it's more for Mooradian and his partners regular than the bus. Roberto Castillo, also from Moraga, likes that Burghardt, the designer, software dian adds with a big smile. the evening shuttle that brings you engineer Ovi Roatis and Mooraback to your car from BART is available every 10 minutes, compared to "I had been using the casual carpool" people are getting into the right cars," the bus's 40-minute intervals.

the pick-up location by Moraga resissays Mooradian. dent Alex Mooradian or one of his partners to set things up. Commuters Bay Area eight years ago and became mutr.com.

an Francisco commuters didn't should already have downloaded the an entrepreneur. He has already app on their iPhones – the android version should be available within a month – on the website (www.getcommutr.com) or on iTunes, and registered for the time slots they need to pick up commuters, if they are a driver, or need to be picked up. "It is critical that people register with the app, so we can guarantee the pick-up time," says Mooradian.

> A glitch happened the first week drivers and passengers every 10 minutes. So to remedy this Commutr is now only taking a few drivers at a time and adding paid drivers to pick up passengers. "We have a waiting list of drivers," explains Mooradian. "As the number of people (using the service) grows, we'll retire the black cars (paid drivers who can wait as needed) and add more commuters."

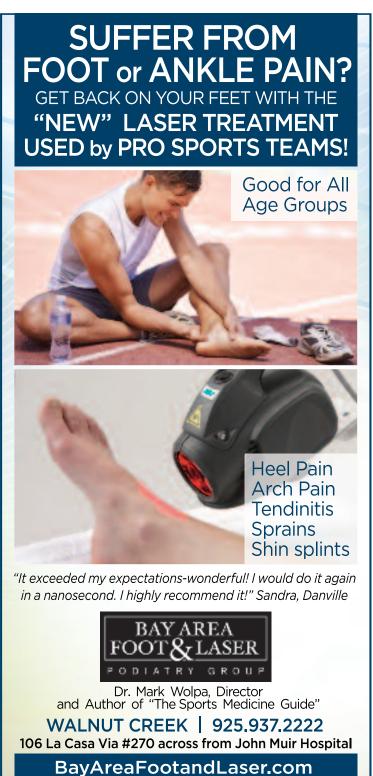
Commutr is a full-time business Sorin Neacsu, the CTO, Zach dian's brother-in-law, John Slack. be anybody here to make sure that in Orinda for two years and in the adds Mooradian. "People will log in During this initial stage, com- back of my mind I kept thinking muters or drivers who have never there must be a better way of doing and drop-off spots, and the program used the service before are greeted at this with the help of technology,"

started and sold two businesses and after the last one, Ready Force, was acquired by Looksharp, he decided to tackle the Lamorinda commute with former Ready Force colleagues.

"We have many requests to expand the service," says the young Moraga dad. They are considering adding a pick-up site in Moraga, another one in Orinda, one in Lafayette, Walnut Creek or Berkeley, as well as a drop-off in Oakland. They are also looking at expanding hours to 8:30 a.m. – the current window is from 7 to 8 a.m. The first two San Francisco drop-off locations are at the corner of Fremont and Howard streets, or the corner of Front and Pine streets.

The cost for the service is \$3 a day. "It costs much less than BART parking plus the ticket," says Mooradian. Of the total cost, \$2 per person goes to the driver, and \$1 to Commutr. "People have told us that we should charge more because they want us to stay in business," Moora-

"After a while there won't need to their times in the app, their pick-up will create the groups in 10 minute intervals." The app is available on the The New Yorker moved to the company's website at www.getcom-





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Pigeon Deaths in Lamorinda Linked to Avian Parasite

By Cathy Dausman

✓movie, birds are dying in Lamorinda. At least one flock of approximately 30 band-tailed pi-said Orinda resident Leeann causes lesions near the mouth regeons in Orinda has already been Brady, who wondered if the devastated, says Dr. Guthrum deaths of the pigeons were caused Purdin of Lindsay Wildlife Museum in Walnut Creek. "These birds look sick," he said. "It's up- and Lafayette area," agreed setting for people to see."

an already low reproduction rate – single births happen only two or three times a year - is experiencing an outbreak of Trichomonosis, a disease caused by a single-celled Trichomonas gallinae.

"It was driving me crazy," by poisoning.

"It's definitely in the Orinda Krysta Rogers of the California The California native bird with Department of Fish and Wildlife. Rogers is an environmental scientist and avian specialist who visited the affected area Jan. 16. She says the band-tailed pigeons are typically found in higher eleva-

ike a scene from a Hitchcock microscopic protozoan parasite, tions in oak woods and conifer forests. They feed on acorns, eating them whole. The disease stricting their ability to feed and they die of starvation or suffoca-

> The disease spreads readily when birds flock during winter months and generally dissipates as the pigeons pair off during mating season. Rogers said the disease Trichomonas gallinae is strictly an avian parasite and will not spread to humans or mam-... continued on page B4 mals.



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