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## Moraga Faire Celebrates 10 Years of Family Fun

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

Ten years ago a small group of Moraga residents became engaged in the town's business in a way that was going to have a long lasting impact. Ellen Beans, a retired resident, took the lead on launching the first Art, Wine and Merchants' Faire. It took only two months to set up that first event that has now become

a Moraga tradition. As Beans says, the merchants, as well as the public, are clamoring for it.

This year's Faire will be held from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on May 14 at the Rheem Center.

Beans remembers the beginning of 2007, when then-councilmember Lynda Deschambault wanted to involve the businesses in the Moraga Beautiful Day event that had been created by former mayor Margaret DePriester. Beans had just joined the Moraga Chamber of Commerce and thought that it

would be a good idea to involve the local merchants. A small group of nine interested business leaders met with her and the idea of the Faire took shape. It was March 5, 2007. The first Faire took place exactly two months later.

Ten years later, the Faire is now the Moraga Community Faire and Car Show. Yet many things are still the same. Mike Metcalf is the mayor now as he was in 2007, and the Chamber of Commerce still supports the Faire.

Beans recalls how the first event was split between the two shopping centers to spread possible economic spinoffs. The Moraga Center housed the Energy Faire; the Art, Wine, and Merchant Faire located in the Rheem Center showcased 11 artists and 38 local merchants, and a wine booth with about four vintners pouring both Lamorinda and area wines. Beans and her team estimated that 800 people attended the first Faire. Last year's count was 2,500 visitors, and about 80 merchants, including the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association.

For the second year many of the staple items were added: the musical entertainment - most of it local; games and activities for children; food - first from local restaurants now food trucks. This year, the Saint Mary's Jazz Band will be on stage, as well as the Joaquin Moraga Middle School Jazz Band, the West Coast Swing Dancers, and Rosemarie and The Rhythm Riders. To close the day, Chinese folk dancers from the Contra Costa Chinese Cultural Enrichment Organization will showcase authentic regional Chinese folk dances with colorful authentic costumes.

The popular car show was added in 2010 and now features 70 trophy cars.

Beans' organizational team has grown so she can envision passing the baton in a year or two.

The team is planning to have this year's theme to be about water. No more bottled water will be sold on site, while a giant blue "water monster" will refill anyone's container at will.

The anniversary will also showcase those businesses that have been there since the first year: Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe, Mechanics Bank, 5A-Rent-A-Space, Montessori School, Loard's Ice Cream, the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association and the Lamorinda Weekly.

Beans also wants to acknowledge the many volunteers who have given their time and energy this past decade, from Boy Scout Troop 246 to Saint Mary's College students, as well as many residents. She adds that the sponsors, all local businesses, donated money for the climbing wall and the bounce houses, and make it possible for the Faire to be a free family event.

The most recent poll shows that 85 percent of the visitors are Moraga residents, and to Beans that means that the Faire has succeeded in becoming the community-building event she dreamed of.

The only element Beans does not control is the weather. She's seen it all, from the days of scorching heat, to a very wet and cold Faire, to that day in May when the wind was so strong that the tents started flying away.

"You just can't predict it," she says with a smile.

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