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Moraga Community Foundation to pay for License Plate Recognition cameras for town entrances

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga Community Foundation members from left: Bob Fritzky, Edy Schwartz, Tom Schnurr and Hays Engelhardt answered questions about the video cameras last Saturday at the Moraga Community Faire. Photo A. Scheck

an image of a car that had been identified on video as belonging to suspects in another case, and she was able to confirm that it was the same car.

"I understood how these cameras were great tools to solve crime," Beckwith says. Since then she has not stopped the campaign. She has been joined by Paul Cohune, who says that there is a perception in town that crime is on the rise.

Both Lafayette and Orinda have installed such cameras in the last few years. Lafayette Chief of Police Eric Christensen attributed the dramatic drop in residential burglaries in 2015 - 60 percent - to prevention, that include residents' vigilance and security cameras installed in town. Both police chiefs in Orinda and Lafayette have said that not all crimes can be prevented or solved by video cameras, but both cities have examples of cases where the license plate reading devices were key in the capture of the bad guys.

Beckwith and Cohune are supported in their quest by the Moraga police department and Police Chief Jon King, who says he believes that the devices are both a deterrent and a crime solving tool.

Since the financial situation of Moraga is not improving, the residents decided to take the matter in their own hands. Beckwith, Cohune and King met with the Moraga Community Foundation and asked the nonprofit to support them.

MCF's president Renata Sos said that the board unanimously approved the project and decided to actively participate in the fund raising effort. The campaign was named the Community Watch Program; its objective is to raise \$60,000 to install the five systems that were approved over a year ago.

The whole structure will consist of five license plate readers installed in conjunction with high definition overview cameras to be able to accurately identify the vehicles. Each unit will be installed at five high traffic entrances and exits of the town. The information collected will be accessed solely by police officers as part of a crime investigation. The data will not be transmitted over the internet.

Cohune and Beckwith quickly started reaching out to community groups in town and were present at the Moraga Community Faire. Beckwith says that some people are concerned about being "watched" but adds that the vast majority is supportive. The first number of donations was encouraging, but there is still a way to go.

Sos and other members of the MCF are also engaged in fundraising for the cameras. The foundation's president noted that the mission of the foundation is to invest in projects that are significant and for the benefit of the community as a whole. She and the board believe that the project is timely and encourages residents to go to the www.moragacommunityfoundation.org to donate.

Lafayette has them, Orinda has them, and soon Moraga will too: License Plate Recognition cameras.

These cameras that read cars' license plates when vehicles enter or exit town will be installed as soon as the Moraga Community Foundation has raised the necessary \$60,000. Residents are invited to contribute.

The town of Moraga approved the purchase of five video cameras in March of 2016, just one week before the sinkhole that collapsed under Rheem Boulevard threatened to dig a big gap in the town's coffers, and all non-essential expenses were put on hold. But one resident decided not to give up. Kristen Beckwith had lived through a scary experience that opened her eyes, and she decided to get the town to act.

The Moraga mom remembers how last year she saw on a private home camera two individuals stealing from her neighbor's mailbox in Moraga. She contacted the police. Moraga had no video camera to track their car, but Lafayette had and the next day Lafayette police sent her

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[back](#)

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