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Donations designated for the Community Watch Campaign will be used exclusively for the purchase of the Moraga Police Department video camera systems.

Goal: \$60,000



Raised to date: \$20,000

## Moraga Police, with help from San Francisco P.D., arrest Uber driver

By Sophie Braccini

Recently promoted Moraga Detective Kevin Mooney says that San Francisco Police Department's Special Victims Unit was very helpful in the arrest of a 42-year-old Uber driver suspected of sexual battery on a Moraga resident.

The man, identified as Leonid Beker, booked in the county jail in Martinez, was released on bail. Uber removed him from the app.

According to the Moraga police report, on May 26, at approximately 1:03 a.m., Moraga Police Department received a report of a sexual battery that had occurred on Camino Ricardo in Moraga. When officers responded, they discovered that a female victim had taken an Uber ride to Moraga from Oakland. The victim's account of the incident is that when the Uber vehicle reached Moraga, the Uber driver stopped before reaching the destination, got into the backseat of the vehicle with the victim and committed sexual battery.

According to the California penal code, any person who touches an intimate part of another person while that person is unlawfully restrained by the accused or an accomplice, and if the touching is against the will of the person touched and is for the purpose of sexual arousal, sexual gratification, or sexual abuse, is guilty of sexual battery. This crime is punishable by imprisonment in a county jail for not more than one year, and by a fine not exceeding \$2,000, or by imprisonment in the state prison for two, three or four years, and by a fine not exceeding \$10,000. Mooney said that both a misdemeanor and felony charges were made at the district attorney's office.

Several sources of information allowed the MPD to identify the driver as Beker, including a traffic camera installed by the city of Orinda at the border with Moraga, as well as the victim's camera. Mooney says that when the SFPD

heard of the case they immediately understood its serious nature and the officers were very accommodating and helpful. As soon as Beker was located, Mooney drove to San Francisco and arrested him. The detective said that Beker was cooperative. He was taken to the county jail in Martinez — Moraga does not have a jail — where he stayed until a \$50,000 bail was posted and he was released.

Andrew Hasbun, spokesperson for Uber, said that what the rider reported was deeply troubling and that the driver was removed from Uber as soon as the company became aware of the accusation. Hasbun added that Uber was supporting the police investigation and that this driver had had no previous feedback of this nature. The spokesperson also provided the screening policy used by Uber. That company indicates that it has a zero tolerance policy regarding sexual misconduct.

Uber's screening policy in California is mandatory. Beyond driving records that go back seven years, every person who wants to drive with Uber undergoes a national, state and local-level criminal history check that screens a series of national, state, and local databases including the US Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Website, the PACER database, and several different databases used to identify suspected terrorists. This research is subcontracted to Checkr, a third-party background check provider.

Mooney said that the investigation is continuing and that if other people have information they should contact him at (925) 888-7056. He expects the results to be presented to the district attorney in the near future. The conclusion of the case will take several more months, depending on a number of factors, including the accused's plea.

## The local garden club helps the Moraga urns come back to life

By Sophie Braccini



The new bridge in the proposed Moraga Townsite subdivision was finished and the concrete urns in place on Munster Street when this photo was taken. The Moraga Barn, center back, was also ready for business. One of the urns is now part of the landscaping at the Moraga Public Library.

Photo Moraga Historical Society



From left, Penny Walwark, Carolyn Westoff, Rena Munson and Ute Kelly.

Photo Karin Biasotti

It just took the desire of the Moraga Garden Club, the hard work of city employee Ruben Ochoa and flowers recommended by the Moraga Garden Farm to give back some life to the old and large concrete urns located on Country Club Drive.

These grandiose and a bit out-of-place features are the remnants of early plans for the Moraga Ranch. They were built in 1915 to signal what was supposed to be the entrance of the town. That dream never materialized, but the concrete features remained, a piece of Moraga history many think is worth preserving.

Carolyn Westoff often drives on Country Club Drive and the empty urns shaded by growing trees in the median strip of the road bothered her. One of the original urns was moved to the Moraga library years ago, where the group she belongs to, the Moraga Garden Club, makes sure it is maintained and attractively planted with flowers. Westoff mentioned the abandoned urns to Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram, who said that something could be done only if the watering system of the urns was operational.

The project fell on the lap of lead maintenance worker Ochoa, who says that he enjoys working with the garden club members. He inspected the sturdy structure, found what was wrong with the irrigation system and repaired it with parts available in the town's corporation yard. He then cleaned up the weeds and old roots before adding fresh soil and compost coming from the town's own compost pile. He turned it over to the garden club.

Westoff was the project manager for the urns and she recruited a few friends from the 150 members of the group, Penny Walwark, Rena Munson, Ute Kelly and Karin Biasotti. They choose begonias

for the color effect and for their low maintenance quality, as well as a few grasses. Ochoa says that the dirt is about 24-inches deep and could even accommodate shrubs.

Elsie Mastick, who volunteers at the Moraga Historical Society, has gathered much information about the beginning of the town and the story of the urns. These concrete elements were installed on Country Club drive — called Munster Drive in 1915 — next to the Moraga Barn that was first built as a hotel by the Moraga Company director Robert Noble Burgess. These features were constructed to attract potential land buyers in the valley.

At the time, there was a railroad coming to Moraga through the Oakland hills and going to Antioch. Munster Drive was supposed to become the main street of the community the owners of the Moraga Land Company had in mind for the valley. But the response from the market was poor, followed by the crash of 1929, then by World War II. Later Donald Rheem created a second town center and what was to become a second shopping center.

The urns remained on the now quiet Country Club Drive. These features are part of the history tour every third grader takes in Moraga, along with the former hotel and the Barn that is now owned and occupied by Gaskin Wealth Management. According to Ochoa the urns are here to stay, unless someone moves them, as the construction is very sturdy. The garden club flowers have restored some of the original pride that was invested in them.

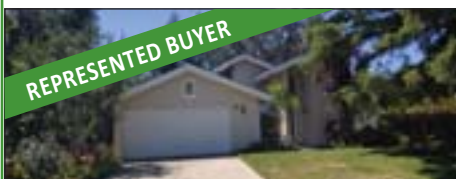
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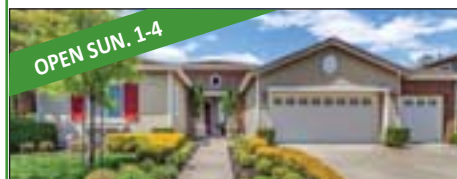


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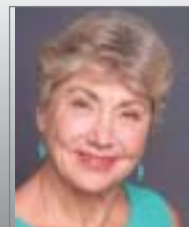


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