

Published June 14, 2017

## 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

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.

It just took the desire of the Moraga Garden Club, the hard work of city employee Rubin 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.



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

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA