



### Fire Districts

#### Public Meetings

**Moraga-Orinda Fire District** Board of Directors  
Wednesday, Sept. 6, 7 p.m.  
Go to the website for meeting location, times and agendas. Visit [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org)

**ConFire** Board of Directors  
Tuesday, Sept. 12, 1:30 p.m.  
Board Chamber room 107, Administration Building, 651 Pine St., Martinez  
For meeting times and agendas, visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.



## Lafayette ambulance response times drop under Alliance

By Nick Marnell



Faster to the scene in 2016

Photo courtesy ConFire

Thanks to dynamic resource management and increased efficiencies in the district dispatch center, the partnership between the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District and American Medical Response – the Alliance – has lowered ambulance response times into Lafayette an average of nearly two minutes in its first full year of operation.

The Alliance began delivery of ambulance service to most of Contra Costa County in January 2016 under a first-of-its-kind arrangement in California. Fire Chief Jeff Carman said at the time that the union of the two providers of pre-hospital emergency medical care under a single governing body would allow for faster and more ef-

cient emergency response.

For Lafayette, the chief's prediction has been on target.

According to district records, in 2016 AMR reported 1,710 ambulance calls into Lafayette at an average response time of 10 minutes and 37 seconds. In 2017 the number of calls reported by the Alliance into the city increased to 2,015, with an average response time of 8 minutes and 44 seconds.

Terence Carey, ConFire assistant chief-emergency medical services division, credits much of the improvement to a more functional dispatch center. The AMR dispatchers moved from Sacramento to district headquarters in Pleasant Hill in February 2016, and between the two agencies, nine dispatchers

are on duty at any one time under one roof.

"Under the old system, you would pick up the phone, the call went to the sheriff's office, then it was given to ConFire, ConFire determined the problem and dispatched the call to Sacramento. Then AMR would dispatch an ambulance," Carey said. He attributed 51 seconds of shorter processing time to the consolidated dispatch model.

With the changes in the dispatch center, fire and ambulance units now share the same radio channel and can communicate directly to manage field resources. Carey said the resultant dynamic reassignment of apparatus added depth to the system, which also helped reduce Lafayette response times.

Carey, a 34-year fire service and EMS veteran, grades performance not only of the ambulance response times, but of the entire EMS system. "The local EMS agency sets our response standards," Carey said. "The other components of the system are the dispatch center, the fire units, ambulances and the hospitals. We work with all five legs to provide a streamlined and more efficient EMS model in order to deliver better customer service."

It's well and good for the Alliance to provide an improved service model, but the Board of Supervisors approved the partnership with the expectation that the venture would also be profitable. Based on data the Alliance supplied to the board in the spring, collection revenue will exceed expenses by more than \$6.7 million for 2016, though ConFire administrative services director Jackie Lorrekovich said in August that figure will likely drop but that the program will show a profit. ConFire advanced the Alliance \$3 million for startup costs, and Carey said after that money is repaid, any profit will go back into the system.

Looking ahead, Carey would like to better assist those with mental health issues. "How do we do a better job on the 14 percent of calls that are psychiatric?" he said. Carey believes that further response time improvement can come with freeing up ambulances from the 90 minutes spent on each mental health-related call at psychiatric hospitals.

"We expect more improvements in 2017," Carey said. "While we are compliant with the LEMSA response time standards, we will not rest on those laurels."

## Residents losing patience with MOFD Station 43 inaction

By Nick Marnell

Amnon Oshri walks his dog on Via Las Cruces in north Orinda every day, alongside the barren construction site of Fire Station 43. "Nothing is being done," Oshri said, lamenting the lack of progress by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District in rebuilding the fire station that was razed in 2016.

"It's just sitting there empty. It's horrible, and it's dangerous," Oshri said.

Honey Hill neighborhood resident Ellen Dale echoed Oshri's frustration. "We are just tired of looking at the vacant lot – which is now full of weeds – and wondering what is going on," she said.

Finding out what has been going on has been frustrating, because the district board has held eight closed session meetings since May, many regarding Station 43 contract litigation, and has reported nothing to the public.

Finally, after the closed session the night of Aug. 29, Fire Chief Stephen Healy explained the reasons for the construction delay. The problems began when Pacific Mountain Contractors, the winning bidder for the Station 43 rebuild, pulled out of the job. The chief gave no reason for the contractor's action, and blamed the construction delays on litigation with Pacific and on putting together terms of a deal with the new contractor, San Ramon-based Federal Solutions Group, one of the original bidders on the Station 43 project. Healy had no comment on the contract negotiations.

"We have been working closely with the fire department on this ahead of the game," said Kabir Singh of Federal Solutions Group. "All of the subcontractors are lined up and we are ready to mobilize once the contract terms are final."



Taller weeds are the only difference between this shot and our July 12 photo. Photo Nick Marnell

Representatives of Pacific Mountain did not return repeated calls seeking comment. The company recently completed the \$5 million construction of Fire Station 32 for the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, and according to Aaron McAlister of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, Pacific remains a qualified bidder for the rebuild of Fire Station 16 in Lafayette. ConFire has

yet to release a request for proposal for the project.

The MOFD board plans to present all Station 43 contract items and updates to the public at a special Sept. 6 meeting at the Moraga Library.

North Orinda is not without fire coverage, as the Station 43 companies have been working out of a mobile unit in the St. Stephen's Episcopal Church parking lot.

## Lamorinda shows solidarity with Texas

"They were initially deployed in San Antonio, but they move around, and their deployment changes by the minute," said Ed Gonzales, ConFire assistant chief

of operations. When they arrived in Houston, Gonzales said the firefighters went door-to-door, searching for and evacuating stranded people and pets, and removing hazardous material from the standing water.

On Aug. 30, the task force had been redeployed to Beaumont, Texas, site of continued heavy rain and life-threatening flooding, with residents clambering to their rooftops for safety.

Jay Lifson, executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, has plenty of experience in local fundraising for national disasters, which have occurred eerily close to the date of the city's iconic Art and Wine Festival. "In 2001, we collected money for 9/11. Then in 2005, it was Hurricane Katrina, where we collected donations in large pickle jars," said Lifson. Though nothing had been formalized by press time, Lifson said he felt certain the Chamber will accept donations for Harvey victims at the 2017 festival.

The town of Moraga has organized no formal relief effort, according to Amy Cunningham, administrative services director. She recommended that people who want to contribute go through appropriate national disaster relief organizations, like the American Red Cross or the United Way.

City of Orinda Public Information Officer Tonya Gilmore nearly matched Cunningham's words. "If contacted, we would recommend that citizens donate

to well-known, reputable relief organizations such as the Red Cross and Catholic Charities," Gilmore said. The city will include information for online donations to the American Red Cross in its weekly online newsletter, the Orinda Outlook.

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Volunteers of Be the Star You Are, a 501c3 charity based in Moraga, are shipping books and supplies to shelters in the Texas area and the group expects to continue its Operation Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief through the end of 2017.



Teens from the Moraga nonprofit "Be The Star You Are" collect books and supplies to send to shelters in Texas as part of its Operation Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief program. Photo courtesy Cynthia Brian



Along Happy Valley Road last Sunday eighth-grader Alexis Doyle, originally from Houston, Texas, organized a fundraiser to help raise funds for the American Red Cross and Hurricane Harvey victims. Students from left: Sigourney Heaton, Alexis Doyle, Victoria Flint, Isabelle Davis, Sydney Pezman and Tommy Bieker. Photo provided

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