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MOFD firefighters share their passion for serving their hometowns

By Nick Marnell



From left, Chris Davies, Brian Oliver and Mark DeWeese: Campolindo-bred, with finishing touches applied by MOFD. Photo provided

saw the fire engine and the ambulance pull up to the school, and then watched a presentation by the firefighters. "Now, it feels so good to be doing the same thing those firefighters were doing back then. It's so cool to give back," she said.

Engineer David Mazaika recently delivered his own fire presentation at Mulberry Tree preschool in Moraga. "I felt so proud to speak at my own school," said the 1995 Campo graduate. "It's an honor to serve the community. I love running into friends and schoolteachers and classmates."

Running into those old friends and classmates can be a mixed blessing at times, especially when the firefighters respond to a call that features one of their friends having done something stupid. "They'll hope it's not me on the call because they know I'll give them a hard time," said DeWeese, one of 13 MOFD firefighters who graduated from Lamorinda high schools.

The close connection to friends and family can also present special obstacles. Engineer Tim Williams grew up in Burton Valley and graduated from Campo in 2001. And though he, too, enjoys running into and serving family, friends and classmates, one aspect of that closeness sometimes stresses him. "I thought it would be easy, but really it's more difficult," Williams said. "I feel the pressure of expectations, and I don't want to let anybody down."

Often the local connection for the fire personnel is through family. Murphy's older sister worked for MOFD, and Mazaika's father worked for the Moraga Fire District. Capt. Brian Oliver, a Campo graduate, had his first contact with the fire service through a family emergency.

"My grandmother had a stroke, and the Moraga Fire District answered the emergency medical call," Oliver said. As his mother, a registered nurse, was settling the bills, she reached out to the fire district but was surprised that she was not billed for the service. "I thought that was such a great burden lifted off of her," Oliver said. It made such an impression that he joined the fire service shortly after college.

Engineer and 2002 Campo graduate Chris Davies comes from a family of ranchers who settled in Moraga from Denmark in 1881. "I am the first firefighter in the family," said Davies, who jokingly looks back at a school counselor who told him he would never make anything of himself if he did not go to a four-year college. Davies is one of four MOFD firefighters who live in the district.

The underlying sentiment of many who interviewed was expressed by firefighter Steve Rogness, born and raised in Lafayette, and a 1989 Acalanes High School graduate. "I got a lot from others as I was growing up, and now it feels great to give back," Rogness said.

Their local agency through which to give back engenders pride in many of the firefighters. "When I came to learn about the reputation of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, it was an easy decision to join here," said Oliver, who had worked for American Medical Response before he came aboard. "MOFD is the premier destination."

There is a good chance that one of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District firefighters who responds to your emergency call either lives in the district, grew up in the district or graduated from one of the three Lamorinda high schools. And to hear the firefighters talk, they could not be more proud of that pedigree.

"It's great. I enjoy the service part of the job," said firefighter Mark DeWeese, Lafayette resident and Campolindo High School graduate who coaches junior varsity football at the school. "We're serving people that we know personally, and I like to think it's nice for them that someone they know is helping them in their time of need."

The desire to give back to the community was expressed by many of the firefighters. Julie Murphy, born and raised in Moraga, a Campo graduate and Saint Mary's College graduate as well, recalled how impressed she was when she attended Camino Pablo kindergarten and

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