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MOFD makes history with all-female engine company

By Nick Marnell



From Left: Katy Himsl, Julie Murphy and Janet Brandi-Rouff Photo Andy Scheck

For the first time in the 22-year history of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, an all-female crew was assigned to a shift, with acting Capt. Janet Brandi-Rouff partnering with acting engineer Julie Murphy and firefighter-paramedic Katy Himsl. The landmark engine company worked out of Fire Station 42 in Moraga on May 8.

"I'm actually surprised it's taken this long for it to happen," said Brandi-Rouff, a 21-year district veteran. According to Brandi-Rouff, having the required job classifications fall in such perfect alignment was the reason that the all-female crew finally came together. She and Murphy are regularly assigned to Station 42, and when Himsl pulled the overtime shift to fill a crew vacancy, district history was made.

MOFD has been ahead of the curve in the employment of female firefighters for many years, and earlier this decade, prior to a retirement and a firefighter moving to a district nearer her home, nearly 10 percent of the district suppression roster included women. Today, three of the 48 district fire suppression personnel are women, still above the national average of 4 percent.

"It's good for the community," Himsl said. "People know that Julie and I grew up here, and they like seeing us on the job." Murphy added that it is empowering for young girls to know that they have role models in a traditionally male occupation.

"Moraga-Orinda has always been forward thinking and has always recognized equal opportunity," said Vince Wells, Local 1230 president. "This (landmark event) was especially significant considering the small size of the district."

Jerry Lee, the battalion chief on duty that day, reflected his pride in the close-knit ties among all district personnel. "Member diversity has never been a problem here," Lee said. "This milestone is just another example of great things going on in our organization."

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[back](#)

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