

Life in LAMORINDA



Volunteers at work



Photos by Lee Borrowman

Moraga Tots Get Big Toys

By Lee Borrowman
 "Oh, who will help me?" cried Miss Penelope!
 Enter the calvary!

Its most satisfied customers may not even have been born when discussions first began around a possible upgrade to the Tot Lot at the Moraga Commons last fall. But this past weekend, volunteers assembled the new play ground equipment which will be available to happy toddlers just in time for the opening of this summer's Concerts in the Park season on Thursday.

The cool new structures were purchased from Big Toys, a purveyor of environmentally-friendly play ground equipment. According to Parks and Recreation Director Penelope Leach, the structures are "made of 100% recycled materials, most of which is recycled milk cartons," are maintenance free and come with a 50 year warranty.

Like many things that happen in our small community, this project was the result of the collective volunteer efforts of many supporters. The equipment was purchased using funds from the Robert-Z'berg grant, a per capita grant that can only be spent on recreation or recreational equipment. To qualify for this funding, the Town had to present its proposal for state review and approval. There is a matching funds requirement attached to these grant monies, so the town had to go scouting for an additional \$21,000 to help fund the project.

The Parks and Rec Foundation was able to donate \$17,000 towards the match because a generous donation was made to the Foundation for this very purpose by the Mark Robeson family. The Moraga Women's Society donated another \$4000, and the match was made. The excavation that occurred in the days leading up to last weekend was done free of charge, by Moraga's own Bay Area Drainage.

But who was going to build this new fantasy land? Up to the plate stepped the Kiwanis Club. About twenty Kiwanis volunteers, and a handful of younger dads,

toiled away on a glorious Saturday under the direction of a project manager supplied by the vendor. Dale Walwark, who coordinated the Kiwanis effort, said, "This town does not have the money or the staff to make things like this happen. We've always depended heavily on volunteer labor and donations." Looking around at row after row of plastic bags full of hundreds of different small parts that somehow all managed to look alike, Walwark joked, "It's every father's Christmas nightmare!" There will be an official ribbon-cutting ceremony before the evening concert on June 21, but the new and improved Tot Lot will be open for business in the meantime.



Meet Tom Clements, Tutor Extraordinaire

By Sarah Henningsen, Campolindo

In an affluent community like Lamorinda, the pressure among youth and teenagers to excel is high, especially when it comes to academics. And with college admissions becoming increasingly competitive year after year, students often feel the need to spend extra time outside of school to improve their SAT scores and maintain solid grade point averages. The various tutoring businesses that have sprung up throughout Lamorinda in recent years help to ease the stress and pressures high school students deal with daily. From small enterprises within the home to large-scale organizations that cater to hundreds of students, tutoring businesses are booming and helping many Lamorinda students receive the extra personalized attention they seek.

Private tutors are common in Lamorinda but usually only advertised by word-of-mouth. Moraga resident Tom Clements assists dozens of high school students from Campolindo and Miramonte high schools. Providing classes ranging from physics and chemistry to advanced calculus and SAT II preparation, Tom is versatile tutor who is knowledgeable in many subjects taught in the Acalanes District. Tom's 4-6 person group tutorials have proven to be extremely effective and worthwhile, in comparison to traditional one-on-one tutoring. He commented, "My approach is much different than standard tutoring, which tends to focus on solving specific homework problems. I present material in lecture format,



Tom Clements with wife Michi

summarizing the main concepts of the chapter we happen to be going over for the week, clarifying the difficult sections and pointing out strategies for problem-solving. My teaching style is casual, comprehensive and straight-forward, a style high school kids can relate to. Also, by teaching kids in small groups, a team spirit evolves and kids benefit from the questions and comments brought up by other students in the group. I enjoy the interaction myself and that's one of the main reasons I teach group sessions."

A former Saint Mary's English teacher and freelance writer, Tom brings special expertise to the writing and grammar sections of the SAT. His strategies for acing the essay portion of the new SAT test have helped numerous students receive perfect scores to boost their overall total. By laying out several simple steps in crafting a strong essay, students have been able to

begin the test with calmness and ease. In addition, Tom is currently working on a new book, How to Write a Killer SAT Essay in 25 Minutes or Less, which is scheduled for publication in the upcoming months.

Tutoring is no longer just for failing students who need a leg up and some extra support outside the classroom environment—Lamorinda students of all ages, even those with already stellar records, spend hours with private tutors or in group sessions to help them maintain solid grades. As Clements commented, "It's unfortunate, but competition is unavoidable these days. That's one reason why tutors are in such demand; parents know that high grade-point averages and good SAT scores are paramount in determining which school their son or daughter gains admission to. In a perfect world, it would be otherwise. As it is, both parents and students have to deal with the reality.

HORSES WITH HEART: ORINDA'S GENTLE HEROES

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Program participation often leads to behavioral breakthroughs. When Harry, a six year old boy from Orinda, came home from a riding lesson his mother asked him how he did. "I am wonderful at horseback riding," he replied. "This was the first time he had said he was good at anything," Lazarus says.

As the parent of an autistic child, Lazarus was acutely aware how few recreational classes were available for the disabled. She founded Xenophon in 1993, naming it after the Greek general

who wrote the first book on horsemanship. Three years later, Xenophon leased their Orinda site from PG&E. The riding center now offers class sessions from June - November and is supported by five licensed instructors and sixty dedicated volunteers.

One avid volunteer, Terry Murphy, Orinda resident and Xenophon Board President, says: "When I want to know whether or not what I'm doing is worthwhile, I look at the smiles of the children on horseback and know

this is what I want to do."

"Horses are incredible animals that make a person feel they can do almost anything," Lazarus says. "They don't care if you use a wheelchair or if you cannot speak. Their unconditional devotion is what makes therapeutic riding a joy for everyone."

Xenophon Therapeutic Riding Center, 60 Don Gabriel Way, Orinda. OPEN HOUSE, Saturday, June 24, 1:00-4:00 PM For information contact Judy Lazarus: Xenride@aol.com. Website: www.xenophontrc.org.

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