

New Fire Marshall for MOFD

By Sophie Braccini



Fire Marshal Michael Mentink at fire station 41 Photo Sophie Braccini

“You’re going to have to fill some big pumps!” joked Moraga Orinda Fire District Chief Pete Nowicki as newly-hire Fire Marshal Michael Mentink stepped in to replace Tonya Hoover, who was named Assistant State Fire Marshall in Sacramento. Mentink wasn’t fazed; formerly an Assistant Fire Marshal in the much bigger district of San Ramon, Mentink comes in with the experience, the poise and the desire to build on his predecessor’s achievements.

“I hired Mike simply based upon the fact that he was the most outstanding candidate in terms of experience, knowledge, and prior education,” said Nowicki. “He’s going to fit into the District perfectly. I can tell his demeanor and presentation will also be perfect for our customer base,” added the Chief.

Mentink is a specialist in wild-land urban interface. As such, he appreciates the work

done by Hoover to complete a global survey and assessment of the two cities of Moraga and Orinda. “She did a great job starting to analyze the fuels and fire dangers in the area,” says the new Marshal, “my intension is to build on her work and intensify the public outreach and education.”

Hoover’s legacy, the “Fire Wise” map, rates every parcel and color codes them depending on the fire risk. Fire Wise can be viewed at <http://www.mofd.org/FireWise-Main.htm>. Find out how at-risk your property is, and get tips to reduce your fire risk.

“You need to help us help you,” insists Mentink. “My experience in San Ramon was different in the sense that the fuel is often different: more grassy areas, higher densities, but with places like Alamo that are similar to Lamorinda. In all our suburbs, education and continuing

communication was the key to prevention.”

Mentink encourages residents to contact the MOFD to get a personalized evaluation. “Call 258-4525 and make an appointment with a firefighter who can look at your property and propose measures to lower your risk.”

Another big task of the Fire Marshal is the enforcement of fire codes. “The mandatory fire prevention measures for new constructions are all excellent examples of prevention best practices,” says the Marshal. New construction and large remodels now need to include residential fire sprinklers that activates when a temperature of 165degree F is reached. “That installation coupled with type A roofs, non combustible decks, small vents in heaves, are excellent defensive tactics for homes,” he adds. On the outside, he recommends the maintenance of good defensive space and a choice of plants for landscaping that will please EBMUD. “Native, drought resistant plants are very often fire resistant,” says Mentink.

Nowicki says the new recruit must hit the decks running. “His first chore is going to be getting comfortable in his new position, becoming familiar with the District, meeting all new contacts, and ensuring that the day-to-day business doesn't skip a beat...and while in the process, he's going to be tasked with his

share of budget creation, input towards the Strategic Plan, and charging into the 2008 weed abatement season. He's going to be a very, very busy person for some time to come.”

Among the day-to-day business, on Mentink’s desk sits a large Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Rancho Laguna development awaiting his attention. “That’s part of my week-end homework,” commented the new Fire Marshal.