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Upsurge in Fake Solicitors in Moraga?

By Sophie Braccini



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As Lafayette establishes its new permit requirement for peddlers, Moraga has recently seen an increase in door-to-door solicitors. Residents are complaining, and the Police Department would like Moragans to know that people who peddle in Moraga need to carry a city permit and be ready to show valid identification.

"It was on Inauguration Day, between 4:00 and 5:00; a young blond couple, alleged college students, came to my door to raise money," recalls Joanne Furio, "the boy was holding a black leather binder, and said they were UC Berkeley students raising money for the orchestra to go to London." Furio says they indicated that their mother lived on a nearby street. The couple added that some of the money would also go to Oakland Children's Hospital for books for children.

Furio replied that she wouldn't give money to an organization if she couldn't check them online and she asked the two to write down the name of their unit; they refused, continuing to state that they were local residents and eventually left. Furio didn't stop there, she says she called the orchestra and was told that no trip to London was planned and that they had no members with the name the young man had given. She proceeded to call Children's Hospital, which as a result of her call, issued a press release.

"The hospital has received a couple of calls from East Bay residents who said someone's apparently going door-to-door selling books and magazines claiming to raise money for our hospital," said Diana Yee, Director, Media Relation for Children's Hospital, "we do not raise donations this way (door to door). If people want to donate to our hospital, we encourage them to visit our website www.childrenshospitaloakland.org and click on the yellow "donate" button."

Janet Gilmore of the UC Berkeley Media Relations office confirmed that the Music Department does not raise money that way.

It may have been the same two people who went to a completely different neighborhood a few days later, with a slightly different tune.

"First a young couple came to my door," said a Moraga resident who would rather not be identified, "they were very clean cut and told me they were living down the street." The two asked the resident money to support the UC Berkeley Music Department. When she asked to see their permit they said they just lived down the street with their parents and gave her a name she didn't recognize; when she said so, they became defensive and left.

Two days later the same resident was solicited by another young man who said he was raising money for Campolindo High School. "I told him that I needed a proof that was true, and he answered that his father was a local doctor who had promised to match any donation he raised," said the resident, "and he gestured up the street to show me where he lived." Once again the resident refused to give any money and alerted her Homeowner's Association.

"People who canvass for money have to register with the Police Department," says Interim Chief of Police Robert Priebe, "after checking their credential and their organization, we issue a letter that they have to present along with their identification, when they peddle." The letter is on Town of Moraga Police letterhead, is dated and signed by the Chief; it identifies the organization and the area where the group plans to market. Patrols get a copy of the letter so they know which groups are legitimate. "We issue these letters just a few times a year," says Deedie Warner, the Assistant to the Chief of Police, "and we never get complaints about these groups."

When the Police are called about suspicious solicitors they investigate and if the solicitors are not holding permits they are asked to leave. "We have seen very well organized groups that come from out of State, they stay at a local hotel and go door to door, often selling magazine subscriptions," explains Priebe. He adds that his department has never issued a citation for illegal solicitation. "Selling magazine subscriptions and lying about who will benefit from it is unethical, but it's not illegal as long as you receive your magazines," adds Priebe, concluding, "Don't give anybody cash and if you have questions, call us."

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