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**Big Lenses, Big Friendship**

By Dean Okamura



First place mustard flower closeup

Photo Robert Johnson



Second place "Timeless"

Photo Doug Kohen

Bob Johnson and Doug Kohen were awarded First and Second Place at the Sixteenth Annual Napa Valley Mustard Festival Photography Contest - Digital Category on March 28, 2009. The long time friends and frequent Lamorinda Weekly photographers credit their willingness to travel the road less taken for their success. They both acknowledge each other in helping their skills grow.

The two met when their kids joined swim team. "I remember

thinking, that this guy has a big lens too," Johnson recalls. They struck up a conversation and their friendship and talents grew. The kids are now college age, but many vacations together have been captured forever.

Johnson's winning photo shows a macro view of mustard flowers in full bloom. Its precision speaks to his skill in lighting, exposure, focus, and depth of field. All traits his patients no doubt appreciate when they visit him in his ophthalmology practice.

"I hang a lot of my photos in my office, so it's sort of my own personal gallery," Johnson says with a smile.

Kohen's photo captures a weather beaten hand preparing to clip a vine. The photo was an idea that came to him when the two approached workers in a field at a winery. "They invited us in, let us taste wine straight out of the cask, and introduced us to the owner," Kohen recalls.

The festival is designed to celebrate the culture of the Napa area. In an attempt to boost tourism from January to March, special events involving food, wine, and art are held. The grand finale of this year's event was held at the Mumm Napa winery in Rutherford. Known as the Photo Finish, it awards the prizes to the winning photographers.

Along with their highest awards, two additional photos claimed honorable mentions from the 310 entries placed this year. "I thought Doug's photo would win," Johnson ponders. Kohen gratefully returns a compliment then both agree that even without accolades they would continue to shoot. "(Winning) gives affirmation to our fragile egos," Johnson adds with a chuckle.

After some prodding, Kohen recounts his meeting with the woman who purchased his photo. "She was weepy," he recalls, "she said when she first saw the photo; it reminded her of her father working so hard in the field." She hugged him and thanked him for taking this photo. "That's better than any award I could ever win," Kohen says with a smile.

When asked where the future of their photography will take them, Johnson says, "possibly a book of



Robert Johnson  
www.rnjphotography.com



Doug Kohen  
www.dckimages.com

fine photos." The two have already self-published a book of photos from a trip to the Galapagos Islands. Kohen agrees, "Photography gives you a reason to explore...that's where I see it taking (us)."

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**MOFD Faces Possible Further Budget Cuts**

By Lucy Amaral

With the failure of the recent state propositions to pass, the Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) is bracing for possibly more cuts to its own budget. At the Board of Directors Meeting, held May 20, Fire Chief Pete Nowicki said that the State of California might need to borrow eight percent of the MOFD property-tax revenue to help offset the state's deficit. That cut could equate to nearly 1.2 million dollars for MOFD's 2009-2010 fiscal year budget.

In a May 14, 2009 news release regarding California's financial concerns, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said that if the proposition failed, the option of

borrowing two billion dollars from local governments and special districts like MOFD would need to be added to the budget proposal to help shore-up the state's pending deficit. These borrowed funds would be paid back over the next three years.

"We are already reducing costs to bare bones," Nowicki said. "We will have enough in reserves to carry us through until we are paid back, but all operations will remain stagnant over that three year period until we receive payment."

The Board directed Nowicki to send a letter to the Governor on behalf of the Board indicating their

displeasure with the Governor's decision to suspend Proposition 1A(2004), which protects District funding. They will also put a more formal resolution on a future agenda for possible adoption.

In other financially-related actions, the MOFD Board approved the 2009-2010 fire flow tax rate for the Moraga and Orinda fire zones, moving to maintain the current rate of 6.0 cents in Moraga and 6.0 cents in Orinda. The Board also declined the Orinda City Council's request to participate financially in the hiring of an independent consultant to further study the MOFD, as well as the District's proportionality and equity issues.

**LAFCO to MOFD, Moraga, and Orinda—Keep Talking**

... continued from page 1

The LAFCO subcommittee did, however, strongly encourage the MOFD, Moraga, and Orinda to actively explore ways to address the infrastructure challenges (from both water supply and road access) that may impede effective fire service delivery across the fire district and particularly in Orinda.

The LAFCO subcommittee members discussed the recommendations proposed in the Municipal Service Review (MSR) with representatives from the MOFD, Moraga, and Orinda to gain local insight on the impact of the proposed recommendations. [The MSR is a state-required, comprehensive review of the fire and emergency medical service providers for a given area.] Gayle Uilkema, who is the LAFCO Vice Chair and the County Board Supervisor for District 2, which includes both Moraga and Orinda, was alarmed by the MSR's reference to a proposal from Orinda's Revenue Enhancement Task Force (RETF) to reallocate fire district funds to address Orinda's infrastructure needs. "When people vote to support fire taxes, they expect the money to be spent on fire and medical services," stated Uilkema. The other members of the subcommittee concurred that

LAFCO did not want to encourage the transfer of funds from fire districts to other agencies.

"Essentially they want to pick the Fire District's pocket to fix Orinda's roads," stated Dick Olsen, a longtime Moraga resident and a former Moraga Fire District Commissioner. Art Haigh, an Orinda resident and a member of Orinda's RETF, countered that delivery of adequate fire service in Orinda is heavily impacted by the sufficiency of the water flow and the condition of the roads, and Orinda's Mayor Sue Severson added that Orinda's situation was unique due to the extremely poor road conditions throughout the city. In response, the LAFCO subcommittee members acknowledged that the availability of adequate water supply and road access, while not specifically within the fire district's responsibilities, are inextricably linked to fire service delivery. The subcommittee recognized the communities' desire for local control and planned to recommend that the agencies work together. "We encourage the fire district to work with the other agencies, because the roads, water, and electricity are all essential to fire service delivery," stated LAFCO member Dave Piepho. "We've got to

work together. The State and the County are not going to fix our problems," he added.

While the options of the MOFD or Orinda being annexed to ConFire were moved off the table, the subcommittee did discuss, in general terms, the concept of consolidating fire districts across the County. LAFCO Executive Director Lou Ann Texilra explained that LAFCO is not empowered to initiate annexation, but the Commission can initiate mergers, consolidations, and the formation of new fire districts. "LAFCO receives their directive from the State, and it is a very powerful Commission," stated LAFCO member Helen Allen. "But our decisions can only enhance fire service," added Piepho, who in addition to serving on LAFCO works as a firefighter in a consolidated district in Alameda. Piepho noted that cities and towns can be part of a consolidated district and still maintain high levels of service. "We [LAFCO] are venturing into uncharted territory which is very uncomfortable for a lot of people" he stated. Piepho added that members of LAFCO would be attending a conference focused on fire district consolidation during the first week in June.

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