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Energy Conservation Help for Low-Income Residents

By Cathy Tyson

Rare is the day when residents can get something for nothing, but Contra Costa County has an on-going weatherization program that is the lucky recipient of additional federal stimulus funds that will more than triple its usual \$1.2 million dollar budget to \$4.3 million.

The program is designed to reduce household energy use and associated costs in the homes of low-income people by installing energy efficiency improvements like replacing refrigerators that are at least ten years old or installing ceiling fans to cut down on air conditioning, in addition replacing broken window glass, installing weather stripping, replacing furnace filters and more is available.

According to Michael Angelo Silva, Chief, Property

Conservation with Contra Costa County, "All of that money needs to be spent by September of 2011." He noted that there is no current backlog of requests. For residents who qualify, right now is a good time to start saving on energy bills. To get started, all it takes is a phone call to the number listed below.

Eligibility criteria are based on maximum household income, ranging from a gross yearly income of \$29,172 for a single person to \$56,101 for a family of four, adjusting upward for bigger families. Even seniors who now live in a million dollar house, but only receive Social Security as income would qualify as well as a renter in an apartment building. As funding increases, those income limits may be adjusted upward to allow more



courtesy of www.fypower.com

participants access to the program said Silva.

After filing out a simple application, providing proof of gross income, providing a PG & E bill and documenting citizenship, residents throughout the county can qualify. Emergency items like a water heater or furnace replacement can be completed in approximately 48 hours.

Obviously the County will be hiring more workers to meet increased demand, one of the many goals of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, better known as an economic stimulus package.

The Obama administration recently announced plans to invest \$3.2 billion in energy efficiency and conservation projects as part of the stimulus package. Over half of that amount, \$1.9 billion will go to cities and counties throughout the U.S. according to the California Energy Commission. California has been allocated \$49.6 million. The goal is to, "Assist cities and counties in implementing projects and programs to reduce total energy use, reduce fossil fuel emis-

sions and improve energy efficiency," according to the California Energy Commission.

There is help available for even non-low-income California residents; the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 contains various energy tax incentives to encourage conservation. Tax credits of up to \$1,500 for installing energy-efficient windows, including skylights and storm windows, and for replacing older air conditioners, furnaces or water heaters are available.

For more information on the low-income programs call (925) 335-1116 or check out their website www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.asp?nid=282. For more general information on the energy component of the economic stimulus package - go to www.energy.ca.gov/recovery/ or www.fypower.org for lots of relevant information from Flex Your Power on rebates, services, and energy efficient appliances.

MOFD Passes

2009/10 Preliminary Budget

By Lucy Amaral

At its June 17 meeting, the Moraga Orinda Fire District's (MOFD) Board of Directors passed the 2009-2010 preliminary General and Special Revenue Fund Budget.

As tax revenue is stagnate and fixed costs have continued to rise, the approximately \$19 million preliminary budget was approved with the knowledge that cuts will need to be made before the final budget is approved. According to MOFD Fire Chief Pete Nowicki, the district could run a deficit of nearly \$900,000 if cutbacks are not made. Now it's a matter of what to cut and where.

Chief Nowicki was instructed by the Board to prepare various budget scenarios to counteract the budget revenue shortfall. "We will dissect the entire budget to see where the least amount of adverse affect in our operational abilities comes from," said Nowicki. "We would need to look at staffing models, and possibly the potential for suspending certain response capabilities (such as not up-staffing on red flag days)."

One area of which Nowicki is keenly protective is keeping stations open. "I would, as fire chief, do everything in my power to keep every fire station open," he said.

The already lean budget has another threat at the door with the possible suspension of Prop

1A (2004), which would then allow the state to borrow property tax revenue from local governments and special districts (such as MOFD) to offset the state's deficit. If that suspension is approved, MOFD could lose another eight percent of its property tax revenue, which equates to about \$1.2 million dollars. The money would be considered a loan, to be paid back by the state within three years.

"If Prop 1A (2004) is suspended, we would try to absorb that in our reserve," said Nowicki. "Because it is borrowed money, we have the expectation that we would be paid back in a timely fashion within the next three years, as promised."

Several letters have been sent to Governor Schwarzenegger by Nowicki on behalf of the Board and the District indicating their displeasure with the decision to suspend Prop 1A (2004). At this board meeting, Nowicki presented the board with a formal resolution which would be sent to the governor stating that MOFD would experience severe fiscal hardship if the State borrows local property tax revenue and the board strongly opposes any proposal to borrow or seize any additional local funds.

Nowicki said that the final 2009-2010 MOFD budget will be submitted to the Board for approval no later than September, 2009.

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Lamorinda Clerks Collaborate



Pictured from L to R Lamorinda's City/Town Clerks Michele Olsen (Orinda), Joanne Robbins (Lafayette), and Marty McInturf (Moraga). Olsen and Robbins recently partnered to host a meeting of the Northern California City Clerks Association at the Veteran's Memorial Building in Lafayette. Olsen, Robbins, and now McInturf, who recently became Town Clerk in Moraga, meet regularly to share information and ideas to help manage their respective city and town civic activities.
Photo Andrea A. Firth

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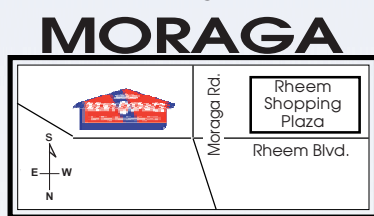
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