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## Moraga Police Department Turns 30

By Sophie Braccini



30 years ago: Chief Robert Priebe (fourth from left, lower row) and former Chief Ruppenthal (first from right, lower row)

"Moraga should have a police staff of twelve," explains Priebe, "a year ago we had only eight, then we welcomed three new recruits but lost two individuals; now we are down to nine and we may lose an additional individual." Priebe has two new employees in the last phase of hiring. "It is hard for the guys who are here, there is so much overtime," adds Priebe, "it might be good for the pay, but they are tired and it has an impact on their family lives."

One of the reasons that police personnel do not stay long in Moraga is that the package offered by the Town is less than attractive. "When I was recruiting for a Sergeant, the City of San Ramon was looking for two new officers and offering \$7,000 more than we were," recalls Priebe, "we can't compete." The Moraga Police Officers Association (MPOA) will soon start to negotiate a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Town. "There needs to be an improved package for our officers," says Priebe, who is not part of MPOA, "the cost is too high when we lose somebody to another agency." The constant turnover costs the Town of Moraga, in terms of risk and in training expense. "The threats are not any lower here," says Priebe, "in larger jurisdictions the force has lots of support. It is not the case here."

Priebe is grateful for the collaboration between the three Lamorinda police departments, which has been enhanced as they now communicate on the same radio channel. One possible plan proposed by the consultant hired by the cities of Orinda and Lafayette to review their police services was the merging of police departments. "A joint force between Moraga, Lafayette and Orinda would make a lot of sense," says Priebe, "it would save money and improve efficiency." However, he is not optimistic about the political feasibility of such a project.



Today: Mustaches are not fashionable anymore, but Bob Priebe is still here (fifth from left, lower row) Pictures courtesy of the Moraga Police Department

Robert Priebe did not organize a special celebration on December 17th to recognize the 30th anniversary of the Moraga Police Department. It was business as usual for the somewhat understaffed department, with officers working 24 hours a day for the peace of the town and its residents. Still, Priebe remembers the years that have comprised his career, leading him to his current position as Police Chief. He feels proud of the accomplishments and the trust that has grown over time, but he is keenly aware of the challenges ahead, as budget constraints make it difficult to recruit experienced officers.

"We've made great progress over the years and I'm very proud of the Department," says Chief Priebe, who replaced Mark Ruppenthal in 2009, "we are providing residents with great service, at minimal cost."

According to Moraga's Revenue Enhancement Committee report, the Moraga police force costs \$147 per capita in Moraga; that cost is \$167 in Lafayette and \$195 in Orinda. According to the data provided by the different police departments, Moraga's crime rate is lower than that of its two neighboring cities.

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