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What So Proudly We Hail

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The flagpole in front of Randy Trudeau's home sports yardarms in addition to a properly-displayed American flag. Photo Doug Kohen

"And yet, though silent, it speaks to us - speaks to us of the past, of the men and women who went before us, and of the records they wrote upon it." - President Woodrow Wilson

Just over the rise of a hill and around the bend of one of Orinda's many winding roads, Old Glory flutters, lifting and resettling with each breeze, drawing the eyes of passers by up and away from the neighborhood's natural brown and green tones.

The flag, which flew previously over the U.S. Capitol and now streams from a nautical-style pole, is part of a quiet tribute to America installed by Randy Trudeau and his family more than twenty years ago at the start of Desert Storm. An anchor that previously graced Lafayette's former Cape Cod Restaurant completes the picture.

Why does Trudeau fly the American flag daily? "It's what I was raised with as a child - and my wife, too. It's just what we do," he says.

Like many Lamorindans, Trudeau has family in the military. His nephew is stationed aboard a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, the USS Harry S. Truman.

Trudeau has also served the nation himself. A past commodore of his yacht club with 45 years of seamanship under his belt, he was appointed to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Northern California Maritime Security Committee. In the aftermath of 9/11, he helped to draft guidelines still used today by recreational boaters as they approach sensitive targets.

Trudeau first came to understand the intricacies of flag etiquette via seamanship training as a child. "Flags are big on boats," he notes. The "boater's bible," Chapman's Piloting, Seamanship and Small Boat Handling, devotes an entire chapter to how and when to fly all manner of banners, including the U.S. Ensign - the sailors' term Trudeau uses for the flag.

American Flag Flying 101

Terry Murphy, liked Trudeau, is a devoted flag flyer. As the commander of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post for Lamorinda and Walnut Creek, Murphy hopes more area residents will hoist the Stars and Stripes high - "certainly on Flag Day, Veterans' Day, and Memorial Day." He offers these three tips:

- Never let the American flag touch the ground.
- Always remember, when you're putting it up, the stars are up and to the observer's left whether it's hung vertically or horizontally.
- Keep it in good condition; don't let it get tattered.

Other key points are presented in Section 6 of the U.S. Flag Code, which was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1942:

"It is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flag staffs in the open. However, when a patriotic effect is desired, the flag may be displayed twenty-four hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness."

Additionally, "the flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all-weather flag is displayed."

Flag Maintenance and Disposal

American flags displayed outdoors may be soiled by air pollutants and even damaged by mildew if stored away when wet. They also fade quickly from their constant exposure to the California sun, and fray frequently from being whipped about on windy days.

While some may be washed with mild detergent, many must be dry cleaned - a process which also appears to preserve Old Glory's deep reds and blues longer. Torn flags should be mended promptly by cutting off the damaged segment and re-hemming. Those that cannot be cleaned or fixed should be retired and replaced.

The correct way to do this, says Murphy, is through a formal ceremony that involves burning. While Lamorinda residents can technically do this on their own because the code stipulates only that worn or soiled flags "should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning," Murphy suggests that residents instead contact the VFW, which collects and stores flags in partnership with local Boy Scout troop 224 until a proper retirement service can be held.

Want to Buy and Fly American?

Residents who shop locally may rest assured they'll be able to fly American-made flags this Veterans' Day and beyond. Lafayette Ace Hardware and Moraga Hardware and Lumber sell various replacement options that are manufactured by the Valley Forge Flag Company and certified as 100 percent made in the U.S. by the Flag Manufacturers of America (FMAA).

Orinda Hardware also stocks FMAA-certified flags. These are manufactured by Annin & Co., which began making flags for ships in the 1820s. Annin made the flag that draped President Lincoln's casket.

Resources:

Flag Maintenance - Orinda Cleaners: 37 Moraga Way

Flag Requests - Senator Dianne Feinstein:

www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/flag-purchase

Flag Retirement Help:

VFW Post 8063 (Lamorinda): (925) 285-1510

Moraga Hardware and Lumber: (925) 376-3600

Local Retailers of American-made Flags:

Lafayette Ace Hardware(r): 3311 Mt. Diablo Boulevard

Moraga Hardware and Lumber: 1409 Moraga Way

Orinda TrueValue(r) Hardware: 56 Moraga Way

* U.S. Flag Code:

www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/RL30243.pdf



MOFD firefighters Adam Thornton (left) and Jacob Airola take down the flag at Station 45 before sunset. Photos Ohlen Alexander



Station 45's flag is carefully folded for overnight storage.

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