

Watching for Wildfire in Lamorinda

Red Flag Fire Patrol

By Cathy Dausman

A small crowd gathered atop Moraga's Donald Drive July 4, 2013. Most came to for the ridgeline view of local fireworks, but others came to work. They were participants in Lamorinda's first Red Flag Fire Patrol – volunteers from Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Communications Support-245. They brought binoculars and radios, and took turns in the hot sun and cool evening scanning surrounding hills for signs of smoke or fire.

They had been trained to look for wild fire and describe it well – its smoke color, plume size, nearby hazards and roads, fire fuel, size and direction of burn. This year fire stations in both Alameda and Contra Costa County will fly red flags distributed by Diablo FireSafe Council, when warnings are issued by the National Weather Service. Lamorinda's Red Flag Patrol will be on the job again this year.

Keith Riley, who worked the afternoon shift last year, remembers “lots of interaction with the public, who seemed surprised, but pleased that we were on watch.” Carol Bergren remembers overlooking Orinda Intermediate School grounds (the site of an earlier fire) and seeing “all the way to Diablo, Tilden Park maybe even to San Jose, and of course the whole valley south of Orinda and Moraga.” Fortunately, shifts were pretty much uneventful, said volunteer Patti Young. “There was one small ruckus at the country club, but it was taken care of pretty quickly,” she added.

“I don't recall even seeing any backyard barbecues,” added Riley.

“It was a great team; not hard work, just hot, and I would gladly sign up for another tour of duty,” Bergren said.



Photo Cathy Dausman



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