



Fire Districts

Public Meetings

Moraga-Orinda Fire District

Board of Directors

Wednesday, Sept. 16, 7 p.m.
Moraga Library Community Room
1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga
For meeting times and agendas,
visit www.mofd.org

ConFire

Board of Directors

Tuesday, Sept. 15, 1:30 p.m.
Board Chamber room 107,
Administration Building,
651 Pine St., Martinez
For meeting times and agendas,
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

Emergency response information and training:

Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
www.lamorindacert.org

Please submit Letters and Opinions:
letters@lamorindaweekly.com

Stress on the Front Line



ConFire engineer Brian Nannini and captain David Woods contain the Gasquet wildfire. Photo provided

The ConFire team was the first arriving outside resource. "There was a lot of fire, and nobody there," said Woods. The fire fell under the jurisdiction of the Six Rivers National Forest Gasquet ranger district, which put the crew up at a campground. "The first two days, we ate military rations," said Woods. "No showers,

nothing. Three days later, as the incident ramped up, they brought in caterers, laundry units, medical units. The area turns into a makeshift city." Welcome additions were the semi-trailers that housed over a dozen shower stalls.

Woods, a 20-year veteran whose children are grown, has served on

many strike teams. "At the King Fire, I didn't talk to my family for six straight days," he said. "Little kids get used to seeing dad being gone for three days or so, but after five or six, family stress starts to build in."

MOFD

That sentiment was validated by Moraga-Orinda Fire District captain Jon Bensley, who returned in mid-August after nine days on a strike team. "We can talk about the Rocky Fire, but the bigger story is what the families go through when we're gone," he said.

Bensley, 33, has two daughters, 2 and a half and 5 months old. "The sacrifice we put in pales in comparison to what goes on at home," he said. "Our wives have the hard job. It's lonely, and they have to hold down the fort and be strong. Thousands of firefighters are out there now, and each one of them has a family back home that is pretty worried. Especially the young families." Bensley's older daughter experienced nightmares while he was away, which his wife attributed to his absence.

But once he received his assignment, Bensley was eager to get to work. His crew checked in at the Lakeport command center, a 30-minute drive from the fire activity. His task at the Rocky Fire was to contain the fire at Highway 20, north of Clearlake, about 100 miles north of

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Lamorinda. The fire burnt through nearly 70,000 acres. "It was unprecedented," said Bensley. "The most extreme fire behavior I have ever seen." The fire ripped through a computer model that predicted a section would take seven days to grow. It took 12 hours.

Two firefighters were killed this year fighting wildfires in California. "When we lose one of our own, it humbles you, makes you take pause," he said, his eyes welling up, staring away. "Those guys were just like us, going to fight fires, and they thought they were fine. Then, something went wrong. We know it could happen any day, and I think it's felt most at home."

Bensley sent his wife a photo of the fire from the front line, but he did not get the reaction he expected. "It really upset her," he said. "We have no phone service at times, my wife hears the news about a firefighter that went down, news is not getting out quickly enough, the imagination runs wild, she panics."

Yet both firefighters left no doubt that they love what they do. "We don't like the uncertainties of our job, but we are happy to do the greatest amount of good we can with the training and preparation we've received," said Bensley.

"I have my bag in my car, ready to leave today," said Woods.



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Letters to the Editor

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. Visit www.lamorindaweekly.com for submission guidelines.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570



Editor:

In disbelief, I read the article, "The Chickens Are Coming" in the Lamorinda Weekly. Having lived on a farm with chickens when I was young, I thought the article was a spoof. How could housing chickens in our small yards be good for the chickens and how would noise, odor, flies, vermin be contained in these small yards without invading the space of neighbors. I attended the Moraga Planning Commission meeting regarding allowing and keeping chickens and bees in residential neighborhoods. Except for my comments, quality of life and environment was not addressed. The speakers conveyed an attitude of entitlement, some already raising bees and chickens unlawfully on their property. The issue of entitlement for those owning land was a double surprise to me because there have been several attempts over the 40 years I have lived in Moraga to limit/regulate projects which increase noise, traffic and endanger the environment. A proposed ordinance was developed by town staff with input from a small group of volunteers. While the proposal lists some general standards, there is no requirement for permits or the installation of sustainable chicken coops; no metrics for measuring nuisance levels of noise, odor, flies, pests and vermin; and no provisions for compliance with measurable standards. If passed, the ordinance would allow anyone to purchase chickens and neighbors would be left to rely on chicken owners' goodwill, competence and attention to cleanliness in caring for their chickens. There is no provision for how and by whom the regulations would be enforced and how much it would cost.

Perhaps this issue has not been well enough publicized. This is the first I have heard of a ground swell of enthusiasm for chickens. There is a reason why the current ordinance for housing farm animals requires one acre of land to raise chickens. The multiple nuisance factors regarding chickens in a small residential yard and the invasion of space of neighbors living in close proximity argue for keeping chickens/farm animals on the farm. If chickens would be allowed in our neighborhoods, their housing would have to be well thought through, well regulated and have enforceable repercussions.

DeEtta Kay Reynolds
Moraga

Editor:

It's that time of year (Sept 19-20) when 100,000 folks will enjoy the best of art, wine, music and other goodies at the 20th Lafayette Art & Wine Festival. Once the dust settles at 6 p.m. on the 20th, Lafayette and its 23,000 residents will revert to their unique combination of communion with nature, honest personal endeavor and strong commitment to family and friends.

This "town" (it's really not a city) is the gem of the East Bay with its semi-rural ambiance, its commitment to quality of life and its impressive array of engaged citizens. Within my group of Lafayette friends, I count friends in local government for many years; others who have helped local schools for years with

swimming and volleyball; neighbors with their kids attending the great schools here and involved in local swimming and/or soccer; finally those friends, who had so much to do with setting up the Nextdoor blog and other communication methods that so many of us use today or our daily needs and chat.

Their friendship and local contributions are two major reasons why I have lived here for years with nary a regret. While acknowledging the march of progress, I am passionate about retaining the quaint charisma of our lovely little town. That's why my friends and I have banded together to form "Save Lafayette," a not-for-profit organization seeking to keep our residents aware of activities in the city and to decide for themselves, as Lafayette voters, how they want this little gem of a town to protect its semi-rural character, great schools and strong community for their children and future generations. We will be holding various events in the coming weeks, including volunteering for the festival and manning our own festival booth just in front of the Bank of the West. Please come by to meet us and learn more about our grass-roots organization -- we would love to meet you!

Michael Griffiths
Lafayette

Editor:

Kudos to the Lamorinda Weekly (August 26 issue) for its in-depth coverage of real-estate projects in Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda.

Each one of these projects -- Deer Hill in Lafayette, Moraga Center Homes in Moraga, and the Wilder subdivision in Orinda -- is associated with controversy.

Why are these projects even being considered during a time of extreme drought? On June 16, the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) sent a letter to its customers, telling them that household water use would be limited to 1,000 gallons per day. Excessive use would be penalized. EBMUD provides water to Lamorinda residents and businesses.

Lamorinda is essentially full. It has no space for additional development. More development means overcrowded schools, a loss of a semi-rural environment, less recreational space, more polluted air, more traffic, and less downtown parking.

It's time that elected officials in Lamorinda showed courage by placing a moratorium on new construction. Specifically, there should be a ban on new water hook-ups in Lamorinda.

All new development projects ought to go to voters -- for approval or rejection -- of more development. Lamorinda's elected officials appear to be afraid of voters' sentiments.

Local city councils must be pressured into preserving, not desecrating, the unique and cherished Lamorinda environment.

Richard S. Colman
Orinda