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Friendly Drop-Offs at Local Fire Stations Keep Spirits Up

By Chris Lavin



Moraga firefighters Dave Iman, Mark DeWeese and Andrew Leach with goods dropped off during the week, including a box of See's candy, a Nation's pie and a mound of homemade muffins. Photo Chris Lavin

early morning hours, Lamorinda firefighters mostly receive good goods. A recent visit to Station 41 in Moraga revealed a table holding a box of See's candy, a pie from Nation's and a big stack of homemade muffins, all unsolicited.

Once a frantic resident rushing to the airport stopped by because he couldn't get the padlock open on his luggage. That is an unusual request, however. One firefighter website keeps a list of unusual things dropped to fire stations: a coral snake in a two-liter bottle, a pug in a dog carrier, leaking dynamite.

"Most of what we get are thank-you gifts," said Mark DeWeese of Station 41. The station used to receive a lot of "sharps" packages, those red medical waste containers full of things like syringes used by diabetics. "Most of those go to the police departments now. But we still get a lot of medications." The firefighters tote them to a big locker out back to wait for recycling time.

In recent years residents are becoming more aware that to dispose of medications by flushing them down the toilet or tossing them into a landfill pollutes the groundwater table and the Bay, so they are more likely to drop off bottles of old pills at a fire station. And years ago, all fire stations were made to be "safe drops" for unwanted babies. Ring the bell, hand over the child, no questions asked - a program that has been credited with cutting down on newborn child abandonment and mortality.

"Thankfully we haven't seen any babies dropped off in the Lamorinda area in more than a decade," said Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Operations Chief Lon Goetsch. A baby dropped off a couple of years ago in a Santa Ana station was recently reunited with the four firefighters who took her in. She was immediately adopted by a local family shortly after her birth and came back to

You never know what you might have to deal with as a firefighter: the proverbial cat in a tree, horrible things like car accidents, an unruly nursing home resident, then, of course, actual fires.

Yet something surprising that firefighters throughout Lamorinda often deal with is a ring at the door, to find a local resident holding a contribution - like a chicken, or a bicycle ... or grenades?

"We've had live grenades dropped off," said Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Stephen Healy in a voicemail. You have to think: Who keeps live grenades? "And m1000 firecrackers," he added. Those are more than 10 times more powerful than an m80. Don't want to have too many of those lying around. Or even one.

While it turns out that some enterprising East Bay residents have figured out that the good old local fire department is a safe place to drop off things that might have become a nuisance, such as a rooster, or even a laying hen that turns out to squawk a little more loudly than expected in the

re-meet her four "uncles."

"No, we don't get too many babies," DeWeese said.

He looked thankful.

Reach the reporter at: chris@lamorindaweekly.com

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