

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

Independent, locally owned and operated!

925-377-0977

www.lamorindaweekly.com

uniquely curated
beautifully styled

women's
apparel • accessories
shoes • bags • belts

weekend wear
& gifts for men

the piece. store

3569 mt. diablo blvd, lafayette
mon-sat: 10am-6pm sun: noon-5pm
www.piecestore.com

26,000 copies delivered biweekly to Lamorinda homes & businesses

FREE



Photo Andy Schreck

Celebrating 10 Years of the Crosses

By Michael Lupacchino

It's become part of the Lamorinda landscape: the collection of white crosses on a hillside in Lafayette. Known as The Crosses of Lafayette, the memorial was erected 10 years ago to recognize American service members who were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In honor of the 10th anniversary of this unique and powerful landmark, there will be a special event at the crosses this Veterans Day, at 5:15 p.m. Friday, Nov. 11. With special guest Congressman Mark DeSaulnier, the event will feature

speeches and poems reflecting on the memorial and its history in Lafayette. All are welcome to attend.

Although the memorial was created as a peaceful protest against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the hillside of crosses has dealt with its fair share of controversy.

The plot of land running along Deer Hill Road is owned by the Clark family. In 2003, Jeff Heaton, a longtime resident of Lafayette and family friend of Louise and Johnson Clark, inquired about setting up a memorial on their property. He

saw potential in the hillside situated across from the BART station and Highway 24.

"I was frustrated with the war," he said. "I had been protesting in San Francisco with thousands of others, and I wanted to do something. The idea came from the World War II movies I watched as a kid which showed fields of crosses, as mass graves for fallen soldiers." The Clark family agreed and in 2003, fifteen crosses were placed on the land, and were quickly removed by vandals. ... continued on page A16

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

Letters to the Editor	A13
Community Service	B4
Not to be Missed	B8-B9
HOW TO CONTACT US	B9
Classified	C2
Shop Orinda	C4

	Exquisite Country Club	Glorietta Estate	Sun Filled Contemporary
			
	Offered at \$1,875,000 www.16lacintilla.com	Offered at \$4,250,000 www.25rusticway.com	Offered at \$880,000 www.18juniperdrive.com
CalBRE#01272382	Laura Abrams (925) 253-4611 www.lauraabrams.com		

Lamorinda Seniors Face Disparity in Parcel Taxes

By Nick Marnell

The four Lamorinda school districts treat residents aged 65 and over inconsistently when they apply for the senior parcel tax exemption on their owned and occupied Lamorinda residence.

The Moraga, Lafayette, Orinda and Acalanes school districts use revenue from parcel taxes to augment funding from the state, parent clubs and education foundations to support district operations. Parcel taxes levied annually by the Moraga School District total \$517; Lafayette School District, \$563; Orinda Union School District, \$509; and Acalanes Union High School District, \$301.

Seniors who own and occupy their residence can be exempt from paying the parcel taxes, but qualifying for that senior exemption is easier in some districts than in others.

According to district documents, MSD and OUSD allow the senior exemption only for seniors who are members of a "very low income household," defined as a household that does not exceed 50 percent of the area median income. OUSD lists that median figure for a two-person household as \$52,650 on its 2016-17 exemption form, while MSD uses \$39,000.

So in order to qualify for the exemption, OUSD and MSD seniors must fill out the exemption form every year, attach a portion of their federal tax return and supply a copy of their property tax bill and proof of age. The OUSD deadline for submission is June 15 each year; MSD allows until July 15.

By contrast, the AUHSD and LSD exemptions are avail-

able to all senior homeowners, without any proof of income.

Because all residents 65 and over are eligible for the parcel tax exemption, AUHSD does not require seniors to provide a copy of their federal tax return, and does not require them to reapply with the district every year. Seniors need provide only once a proof of age and a proof of residence. "We wanted to make it as simple as we could for our seniors," said Julie Bautista, AUHSD chief business official.

A similar procedure is followed by the LSD, but the district also requires a copy of a utility bill. "Once your application is accepted you will NOT need to reapply in subsequent years, provided your ownership and residence remains unchanged" is underlined at the bottom of the exemption form.

Dr. Carolyn Seaton was not around when the parcel tax language was written, but the new superintendent of OUSD gave her opinion on the district's senior exemption restrictions. "In my experience, residents, including senior citizens, are often supportive of a local school parcel tax because they believe strong local public schools are an investment in their community and help maintain their property values. In the short time that I have been in Orinda, I have observed the full school community, including our businesses, local agencies and our residents, to be extremely supportive of our schools," Seaton said.

The MSD parcel tax language preceded Bruce Burns, district superintendent, who said that he does not know why the very low income household qualification was used in the

original ballot measure, but that the latest parcel tax committee wanted to ensure there was consistency between the taxes of 2004 and 2014. "It was maintaining a system that was in place," Burns said.

From the latest information supplied by each district, AUHSD recognizes a total of 40,603 taxable parcels of which 5,242 qualify for the senior exemption. For LSD, 10,284 parcels, 1,666 senior exemptions. OUSD, 7,865 and 78; MSD 5,935 and 52.

In a typical year, Lamorindans pay more than \$21 million in parcel taxes to the four local school districts.

Election 2016

This issue we take a look at three controversial items on the Nov. 8 ballot: BART, marijuana and Measure C.

On page A9, writer Nick Marnell examines Measure RR, the \$3.5 billion bond BART is seeking to improve and update its service.

On page A11, Marnell takes a glimpse at how everyday Lamorindans view Proposition 64, which would legalize pot for adults age 21 and over in the state.

And on page A12, we offer up a Pro/Con on Lafayette's volatile sales tax, Measure C.

Look for a wrap-up of local election results in the Nov. 16 issue of the Lamorinda Weekly.

Civic News A1-A16	Life in Lamorinda B1-B10	Sports C1-C4	Our Homes D1-D12
Lafayette scrambles to find new city offices – page A2.	SMC delivers a winning "Twelfth Night" – page B1.	Local football teams gear up for post-season - page C3.	"Founding Gardeners" pay a visit to local garden club – page D1.
Fire Districts A8			
MOFD doesn't take up tax group concerns – page A8.			