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Letters to the Editor

Unification key to schools' survival

Dear Editor,

On April 20, the front page headline of the Lamorinda Weekly read: "Local school districts anticipate possible budget deficits;" the lead story on KTVU covered the attempt of parents of Northgate High and its feeder schools to leave the Mount Diablo School District; and we received a letter from the Lafayette School Board asking that my wife and I forego our Senior Citizen Tax Exemption.

Once again, the forest has been obscured by the trees; the trees being the five school districts encompassed by the area within the Acalanes High School District. Twenty-first century economics do not allow 20 Century luxuries to successfully continue. Each K-8 district and Acalanes must employ a separate superintendent, district office, director of curriculum, facilities department, and on and on. Any one superintendent costs each district's taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages, benefits and perks as well as each and every redundant position in each of the five districts.

This is a perfect time to reach out to the folks attempting to leave Mt. Diablo School District and present the county and state with a plan to unify K through 12th grades, within the entire area, and save the schools and taxpayers the money needed to ensure the continued high quality of education Lamorinda has long cherished.

We need the residents of our community to step up and begin the process of unification and save our schools.

Robert Steinmetz
Lafayette

Don't cut down trees for PG&E

Dear Editor,

PG&E will change the look of Lafayette forever with their plan to cut down 270 large trees along public trails and private properties. And the city's response on March 27 falls short on preserving Lafayette's most precious resources.

Without an iota of proof, PG&E claims many trees along the Lafayette Trail and other areas must be cut down for the safety of the underground pipeline. When pressed, PG&E acknowledges that the pipeline is safe and simply conducting a "proactive" step. We believe this is a cost-cutting measure at the expense of our environment.

The 2010 explosion in San Bruno was proven to be caused by defective welds, not big trees. The gas pipeline has coexisted with our large oak and buckeye trees for decades. And should any problems arise, shut-off valves are in place and functional. There is even evidence tree roots help gas lines by stabilizing embankments.

Meanwhile, 216 of these trees destined for the chainsaw were protected under city ordinances including a 87-inch diameter oak on the Lafayette Trail. Some are hundreds of years old. And since these trees are so large, each removal will make a huge impact on the look of our community. Home values could drop, and natural habitat will be lost forever. What happened to Lafayette's mission statement to preserve and enhance the semi-rural nature of this community?

We appreciate the city's efforts to reduce the number of trees removed, but 270 is still too many. Instead of waiving ordinances and accepting \$530,000 from PG&E for improved street meridians (yes, meridians), the city of Lafayette should insist that PG&E move the pipeline five feet further into the trail, thereby eliminating the need for unnecessary clear-cutting.

If anyone responds with "but what about the cost?" perhaps they should ask PG&E that question. As our gas bills have jumped, their quarterly profits more than doubled to \$675 million.

Michael and Gina Dawson
Lafayette

Combining districts makes sense

Dear Editor,

It is interesting that there is a recurring school financing problem in Lamorinda. In the early 1980s when we lived in Moraga, we had a significant problem in the three districts with declining enrollment and financing the curriculum. There was a group who wanted to end this problem. I went to the county board of education and did a very thorough analysis of costs in the three districts, along with a lot of information.

The major findings of this were:

1. Combining these small districts would yield one district of just under 5000 students giving an optimal district.
2. We would save close to \$2 million (in 1980 dollars) and restore the music, arts and language programs, while adding languages. a stronger core with smaller classes.
3. The 3 districts could still fund raise for their own schools and have a degree of local options.

It was clear at the time, that a very strong group was more interested in maintaining their little power fiefdom, then really helping the kids. The kids of this time suffered these cutbacks and reduced educational options, but that was never a discussion, the power structure was. But if Lafayette is starting to have

problems, are the other two far behind?
Time for the parents of school kids to go study the issue again.

Leonard Dorin
Lafayette

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