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A smoky sky blankets Moraga in the late afternoon on Nov. 9.

Photo Sarah Christensen

# Smoke a reminder to plan ahead

By Cathy Dausman

Life, they say, is what happens when you're making other plans.

But life in California – here and now – is defined by a new norm: year-round wildfires of unprecedented ferocity. “The weather has changed,” says Moraga-Orinda Fire District emergency preparedness coordinator Dennis Rein. “Having a major wildfire in mid-November is the new norm.” Just ask residents in Butte County. Or Solano. Ventura. Mendocino.

Last year devastation hit the North Bay, while 27 years ago, Alameda County fought a firestorm whose effects still

resonate within the community.

With fires again making headlines relatively close to home, Rein can only hope this will motivate Lamorindans to plan for the worst, yet hope for the best.

Here are some ways to plan ahead:

First, consult Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team website for a checklist of “to do’s” in case an evacuation is ordered: <http://lamorindacert.org/documents/Evacuation%20Tips.pdf?x18924>.

Make your smart phones smarter. Sign up for Nixle

alerts at [www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com) from local law enforcement agencies, and monitor county-issued warnings about shelter in place or evacuations by subscribing to Contra Costa County’s Community Warning System at <https://cwsalerts.com/registration/>. When it comes to evacuation orders, this tool, says Rein, is “a home run.”

Red flags are flying at local fire stations, and you can add another layer of safety to your home with weather alert radio tied into area red flag warnings.

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## Lafayette mourns unexpected death of Council Member Mark Mitchell

By Pippa Fisher



Mark Mitchell Lamo archive

Lafayette City Council Member Mark Mitchell passed away unexpectedly of natural causes Nov. 5 at the age of 61.

The sudden loss has stunned the community.

“During my years here, I’ve not met a person who loved La-

fayette more than Mark Mitchell,” said City Manager Steve Falk. “His political philosophy was simple: whatever is best for Lafayette. He always put his community before himself, and for that he deserves our highest respect and honor.”

Mitchell was a lifelong Lafayette resident, moving to the city with his parents when he was just a few months old. He attended Lafayette schools and went on to graduate from UC Berkeley. He returned to Lafayette with his wife to raise their two children where he was very involved with Boy Scouts and youth sports, coaching 11 different teams over the years. He worked in real estate and property management.

Mitchell served on the Planning Commission from 2001 until 2012 when he was elected to the city

council. He served as mayor from 2015-16.

Mitchell’s work with the LPC included a number of long-range documents and policies that set the framework for development in Lafayette. A statement from the city read, “Always displaying great deference to the general plan, his work as a planning commissioner included general plan and hillside ordinance updates, and he was instrumental in formulating the downtown plan and the building of the Lafayette Library & Learning Center.”

Mayor Don Tatzin remembers Mitchell as a thoughtful and dedicated public servant. “We are all saddened by his passing. Our thoughts are with his family at this time,” said Tatzin, adding, “Mark was the type of person we should

want to emulate. He was particularly helpful in improving the relationship between the city and the Lafayette School District and working to improve the East End. Mark’s actions reflected well on the city and on him. He served on the council for one reason: to better the city, not to enhance his position or draw attention to himself.”

Falk said, “As his city manager, there were periods where Mark and I spoke to each other every single day. I will miss his curiosity, his positive attitude and encouragement of good staff work, his willingness to change his mind if he heard a better argument, his willingness to embrace an unpopular decision, and his fearlessness in defending that position. And of course, his abiding love for all things Lafayette. Mark

Mitchell was just a very fine, amiable man who chose to live his life as a citizen.”

A standing-room-only celebration of Mitchell’s life was held Nov. 11 at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Lafayette.

In lieu of flowers his family has requested that donations be made to any charity that residents and friends feel is important to them or to Habitat for Humanity, of which Mitchell had volunteered throughout his life. <https://www.habitat.org/>

Residents are encouraged to share memories of Mark Mitchell in the city’s electronic memory book ([http://www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/lafayette-listens?pd\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.opentownhall.com%2Fportals%2F282%2FIssue\\_6929#peak\\_democracy](http://www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/lafayette-listens?pd_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.opentownhall.com%2Fportals%2F282%2FIssue_6929#peak_democracy)).

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