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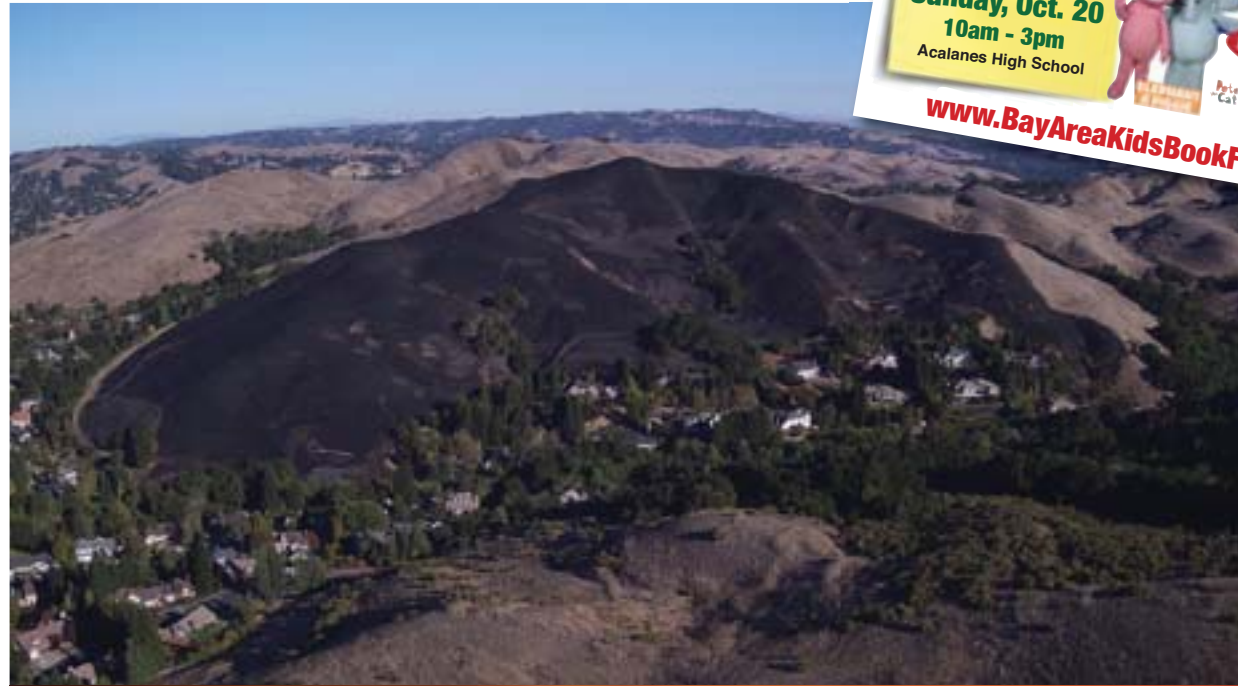
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Fire at Sanders Ranch in Moraga; lines for gas in Lafayette; shuttered shops in Orinda; refrigeration trucks at Whole Foods Market. Photos courtesy MOFD; J. Wake; Pippa Fisher; Sora O'Doherty

Fire and fury experienced in Lamorinda

By Nick Marnell, Jennifer Wake, Sora O'Doherty and Pippa Fisher

In an effort to reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildfire event, the Pacific Gas and Electric Company Public Safety Power Shutoff left millions of people without power across 35 counties in Northern and Central California last week, beginning in the Lamorinda area at 11 p.m. on Oct. 9.

Not long after power was cut, a 50-acre vegetation fire in the Moraga hills caused the evacuation of 140 homes in Sanders Ranch early in the morning of Oct. 10. The fire, reported at 12:54 a.m., burned 50 acres near Merrill Circle North and Sanders Ranch Road, south of Saint Mary's College.

"Because of the PG&E power shutoff, we had resources already staged," said Dennis Rein, spokesman for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. "We were as prepared as we could have been." Due to adverse weather

conditions forecast, fire agencies predeployed extra resources in order to respond to potential catastrophic wildfires.

At the height of the incident, 150 firefighters fought the blaze, including five engines from the state Office of Emergency Services, a state strike team from the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District and a Cal Fire crew from Humboldt County.

The fire burned down a hillside to the backyard of many of the homes on Merrill. ... continued on Page A8

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Private roads workshop facilitator reports back to Council, where now?

By Sora O'Doherty

At the Oct. 1 Orinda City Council meeting Jim Bourgart, a former California assistant secretary of transportation, listed 17 "ideas for possible exploration" suggested to him during a workshop on private roads. After many public comments and a wide-ranging city council discussion, the council decided to await further information from its subcommittee and the Citizens Infrastructure Oversight Committee before moving on to polling public opinion and conducting further studies of private roads as well as both public and private sewers and drains.

The Aug. 27 workshop explored the issue of Orinda

taking over responsibility for upgrading and maintaining private roads, Bourgart said. The workshop provided substantial time for the residents to make their case and explore the issues in depth, plus time for city staff to present information on the subject. The workshop included formal presentations by a private road residents group and by members of city staff, including the public works director, city attorney and finance director. The residents' presentation was made by six spokespersons.

Bourgart summarized the key points from the workshop. The public works director presented data regarding public and private roads and outlined the different categories of private roads. He

described the funding of public roads and the work that has been done in the past several years. He also explained the additional risk and extra cost incurred when road maintenance is deferred for too long. The city attorney explained the legal complexity involved in acceptance of private roads by the city, possible city maintenance of private roads and possible city funding toward private road maintenance and assumption of liability. All would involve substantial legal work. She cited the "public benefit" test that would be applied.

Drainage law is related and is also complicated. The finance director explained the options for securing additional funding through a variety of potential ballot mea-



asures, such as a general tax versus a special tax and their different voting requirements. The private road residents group made the case that the treatment of maintenance of their roads is unfair, in that they are paying taxes and fees without deriving the same benefit as public road residents. Private roads and public roads have similar physical characteristics. There is a need for condition surveys of private roads and drainage.

Bourgart suggested that the council may choose to give direction to staff to pursue research and/or undertake additional analysis of any of these ideas and options identified at the workshop, including maintaining the status quo, with the city re-

maining responsible only for roads formally accepted into the public system; modifying Resolution 59-18 to ease standards for consideration for private road acceptance; conducting condition assessment surveys of private roads and/or private drainage, to at least the level of specificity used for the public roads and drainage, and estimate costs to do the condition assessment; or accepting all private roads unconditionally. (See link below for a full list of discussion points.)

Questions from the workshop included: Could the City, through its buying power, cover—or obtain a better rate—for insurance paid for by private individuals or associations?

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