

# LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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Santa Claus stops by the Hacienda de las Flores

Photo Vera Kochan

## Santa makes home visits ahead of holiday

By Vera Kochan

It is a rare occasion indeed when one gets a glimpse of Santa Claus in the middle of his rounds. Thanks to Moraga's Department of Parks and Recreation, Santa made a few early home visits Dec. 16-20 to surprise some children in the town.

With a smile on his rosy-cheeked face and a "Ho-Ho-Ho" ever present in his conversation, the

jolly bearded gift-giver in his stylish red outfit granted a quick interview before heading out from the Hacienda de las Flores.

"Most of the children are receptive to my visit," Santa stated. "Although, one or two of the younger ones start to cry. If one starts to cry, the rest start to cry. They're not really certain of who this person is in the red suit. Ho-ho-ho! Some of the older children have cried, too!"

Santa mused, "When I ask them what they'd

like for Christmas about 25% really don't know what they want. They usually ask me for one thing. The bolder ones produce their list and start to read from it. Ho-ho-ho!" He added, "So many of them just want Mommy and Daddy to be happy and healthy. They ask for me to help relatives that are sick. A few have asked for their loved ones in the military to be safe. Their sincerity is very touching."

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COMPASS

## Orinda detective recognized for work with FBI, and nabbing 'the shaggy bank robber'

By Sora O'Doherty

It wasn't like television when Orinda detective Denny Cai teamed up with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to track down and arrest a bank robber who had robbed two banks in Orinda and 17 others in the Bay Area. There wasn't any interagency resentment; all the officers worked together toward a common goal that was achieved when Cai entered a hospital room in Oakland where Duane Makela had just become a father and Cai arrested him on 19 counts of

bank robbery.

Makela allegedly robbed the Bank of the West in Orinda on April 17, 2018, of \$13,000. In November of that year he allegedly robbed the Orinda branch of Wells Fargo of \$800. No one was hurt during either robbery, but at Wells Fargo Cai says that the suspect pretended to have a gun and pointed it at the teller.

During this period, the San Ramon police department was investigating a similar robbery. The FBI was also looking into a series of Bay Area robberies. The robber

had been dubbed "the shaggy bank robber" owing to his modus operandus of wearing a disguise with fake facial hair, a wig, and glasses or sunglasses.

After the first Orinda robbery, Cai watched footage from a city camera mounted near the roof on a Bryant Way building that points toward CVS. During the hour-long footage, Cai saw the suspect walking up Moraga Way. It could be seen that he was driving a black Mercedes van. When the suspect drove off, Cai could see he was wearing an orange sweater. Cai

looked at footage from the camera mounted at the east-bound Highway 24 entrance and caught the license plate. It turned out that the vehicle had been stolen earlier the same day in Walnut Creek.

This did not lead to an arrest, however, and the matter became a cold case. But then there was another robbery in November at the Orinda Wells Fargo. Police knew it was the same guy: wig, glasses, fake facial hair. This guy was committing robberies all over the Bay Area, Lake Tahoe, Mountain View. The break in the case came

when the robber dropped his demand note and the police were able to find a fingerprint on the note, which led to Makela.

An FBI agent who was the liaison on the robberies called Cai, who was able to find Makela's phone number on a public database. He wrote a search warrant and asked a judge to ask the carrier to release all call information for a day or two before and after the robberies in Orinda. About two weeks after the warrant was served, Cai received the information.

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