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Proclamation for Moraga Garden Center's Kenny Murakami

By Vera Kochan



have been fixtures in the Moraga Shopping Center for nearly 50 years. Located in an almost hidden corner at 1400 Moraga Rd., Murakami sold plants and freely gave away gardening advice to his loyal customers.

The Moraga Garden Center and owner Kenny Murakami

Forced to retire by an ADA compliance lawsuit from a serial plaintiff, Murakami decided that the cost of making his garden center (which was constructed prior to the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act) up to code was too cost prohibitive. Also citing his wife's health, he felt that the writing was on the "garden wall." However, on the brighter side of things, Murakami is looking forward to spending all of his extra time with his wife as they "stop and smell the roses."

Kenny Murakami prunes a Japanese Maple in a Moraga yard Photo A. Scheck Mayor Mike McCluer, at the Sept. 22 council meeting, gave a proclamation noting all of the selfless gestures that Murakami had done for the town and its citizens

such as providing daffodil bulbs for the annual plantings on Moraga's hillsides and roads; giving valuable advice on many projects along with providing locally-sourced plants for the Hacienda de las Flores gardens; offering instruction in pruning techniques and the prevention of fire-blight (a pear tree killer) for the 100-plus-year-old pear trees on the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School property; free consultation to the Moraga Gardens Farm that provides produce to local schools and nonprofits; and his partnering with the Moraga Garden Club in helping to design the Moraga for Monarchs habitat at the Rancho Laguna Park.

A photography professor at Santa Clara University, Takeshi Moro, was so taken by the community's reliance on Murakami's advice and quality vegetation that he decided to create a photo book based on plants purchased at the Moraga Garden Center and how they are thriving in people's yards. He plans on printing a limited number, and once the costs are cleared, all proceeds from sales will go to Murakami. The book will be available at Lafayette's Orchard Nursery, Lazy K, Orinda Books, McDonnell Nursery, Ace Hardware Moraga, and Across the Way.

The Moraga Garden Center will close its doors for good on Oct. 31. The website's mission statement can also serve as its epitaph: "Our goal is to introduce our customers to the wonderful diversity of the plant world, from the edible to the ornamental, to the curiosity. Our goal is also to help our customers become more successful and knowledgeable gardeners with sound science-based advice. A more knowledgeable gardener is a better gardener."

Mission accomplished, Kenny!

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