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Letters to the editor

A dissenting view on Lafayette's hillside 'memorial'

I first saw the hillside crosses opposite the Lafayette BART station in February 2005, immediately after returning from a yearlong tour of duty in Baghdad as a Medical Service Corps officer in the US Army. When I saw them, I became angry as it seemed to me that the sacrifices of my fellow servicemembers, Coalition forces and countless Iraqis were being exploited for a cheap political end. The intervening 20 years have not changed my opinion, that it serves no useful purpose and should be removed. Real people with real families lost their lives in Iraq, and in Afghanistan, and in countless other places. The impersonal and anonymous nature of the Lafayette crosses underscores that the people who erected them did not know or care about the victims or the parents, siblings and children who suffered, as individuals. The crosses provide no comfort to the families of the fallen and are not meant to.

Ask any soldier, if you should be fortunate enough to meet one, and they will tell you that wars are bad, especially for the people in them. But they will also tell you that their comrades who gave their lives, and their families, deserve personal recognition for their sacrifices as people, and not as faceless unknowns. There are better examples of war memorials, the Vietnam War Memorial for one, and even Lafayette's own Veterans Memorial Building, where the builders took the trouble to find out who they were memorializing, and why.

John Donnelly
Moraga

Crosses: Overrated impact, dilapidated, kinda creepy. Not Iconic anymore

I've been meaning to write regarding the crosses for several months. Now is the time.

First, I live two blocks away, and have passed by the hillside thousands of times in my residency, maybe tens of thousands of times. I recently brought the young one there, under two years old, on a walk. We hovered near the center of the exhibit, but our stroll there was short lived as up close, the hillside reveals the crosses are dilapidated, lacking paint, often falling apart, and in general kind of a beside the point exhibit. Certainly nothing profound is felt upon seeing them. I remember the names on some religious memo-

rials but the mass above these names added nothing.

The weathered notion of a non-cemetery hill of crosses is off putting, up close, in their current state. The region has moved on. A small group of Mt. Diablo club members may show up for events, with a camera-seeking politician ready to microphone (verb) on the big days, but I would wager the crosses are a puzzle to passersby. It is not an interesting place. The call of the 2000s is long past, regarding such a visual. I appreciate Karen MacMichael doing a world peace sermon, but many residents may have a military connection, even if a generation removed, so it is sometimes already on the radar. We do have a Purple Heart winning Iraq War veteran housed near the corners of Monroe and Moraga Blvds. He, like the current owner of the hillside, shall remain anonymous. I tend to think one of these nameless folk would be more publicly embraced than the other. The grateful city that we are, I assume many of the Acalanes graduating classes near 2001 knows this veteran's travails and triumphs.

Time moves on. The crosses have had their day. Maybe in the case of the hillside, I would favor 400 units of low-income housing, yes, in my backyard. Let's do it! As long as the overseeing housing authority is not derelict and does not misdirect its funding, the wood of these 400 will not chip and crack, nor split and fray, as has the currently embedded material.

Dad did a tour or two, or was it three. Yes, his aunt, and parents, and wife, and children, know the costs. I heard it said recently, no need to be sanctimonious or preachy. Often a picture is worth a thousand words.

Jim Rule
Lafayette

Regarding East Bay Sea Serpents story

I was delighted to read Asha Spitzer's piece on the East Bay Sea Serpents' participation in this summer's Orinda Moraga Pool Association swim meet. It is rare to find a

news story with such in-depth coverage of a Special Olympics event, complete with athlete comments. Spitzer does an exemplary job of treating the athletes as athletes and bringing the event to life.

Anyone interested in swimming or volunteering with the East Bay Sea Serpents can visit the team's site at <http://www.ebss.team/>.

Jennifer Reid
Lafayette

50th Anniversary of Orindawoods

Orindawoods is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Thanks to our Firewise volunteers, Orindawoods is a Firewise USA community. We spend hundreds of thousands of dollars maintaining our 187 acres (about 4% of Orinda!) and complying with MOFD regulations. Last year, we removed 40 dead and dying large trees. We clear our large open spaces every spring to minimize fuel for a fire. Orindawoods Drive is a major evacuation route in case of a natural disaster. Orindawoods also clears the route for our first responders and neighbors.

We have no gates or barriers. Lamorinda residents can jog or stroll along on our sidewalks and enjoy our lovely gardens and parks. We do ask dogwalkers to please clean up after your dog and remove all waste. Please don't leave a bag of dog waste on our sidewalks! We love the steady procession of dogwalkers and pets, but note we don't have anyone to clean up after your pet!

Our lovely pond is home to waterfowl and fish. We welcome visitors to enjoy the pastoral scene, but we cannot permit fishing due to insurance restrictions. Please pass the word, as some anglers apparently can't read the "No Fishing" signs!

Orindawoods takes seriously its charge as the steward of this beautiful community. We extend a warm welcome to our fellow Lamorindans to enjoy a lovely walk through Orindawoods in its golden anniversary year.

Dick Rogan,
President, Orindawoods Association

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters must be factually accurate. Lamorinda Weekly reserves the right to refuse publishing a letter submission. Visit www.lamorindaweekly.com for submission guidelines. Email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, 1480 Moraga Road STE C #202, Moraga, CA 94556

With concerns regarding proposed toll hikes on bridges, SB-532 is put on hold

By Vera Kochan

Seven members of the House of Representatives, led by Mark DeSaulnier (D - Walnut Creek) and Anna G. Eshoo (D - Menlo Park), had written and signed an Aug. 4 letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom, State Senate and Assembly Leaders Toni Atkins and Robert Rivas (respectively), expressing their concern over SB-

532 - a bill that, if passed, would have raised tolls on seven Bay Area bridges (operated by Bay Area Toll Authority) by \$1.50, resulting in drivers paying \$9.50 to cross one bridge as soon as 2024. This would not apply to the Golden Gate Bridge, which is operated and maintained by Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District.

SB-532 was written by State Senator Scott Wiener and Assembly Member Lori Wilson (D - Suisun City) with the intent of giving Bay Area transit agencies enough time to continue services while seeking a reliable source in the form a possible ballot measure.

During an Aug. 22 interview on KTVU FOX 2 Wiener stated, "We had a lot of support in our Bay Area legislative delegations, but there was opposition, too. So ultimately, we ran out of time to try to build consensus, so we are going to work over the fall recess to try to build more consensus around a funding solution."

If SB-532 had passed, Lamorinda residents who commute to work five days a week over bridges could have expected to pay approximately \$2,470 in annual toll fees. Hardest hit would have been low- and moderate-income residents who don't have the luxury of working from home.

"Data from bridge toll transactions shows that 59% of toll payers on the Bay Area bridges come from just three East Bay counties: Alameda County (27.5%), Contra Costa County (19.7%) and Solano County (11.8%)," stated the letter. "On the San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge alone, where over 31 million toll transactions occurred in one year, 52% of the toll payers came from Alameda County and Contra Costa County. Further, the percentage of bridge drivers originating from Contra Costa County, San Mateo County, and Santa Clara County has increased since 2015, and now

accounts for almost 31% of toll transactions."

The letter also acknowledged that COVID-19 had an adverse effect on transit systems to the point that financial sustainability took a hit, and ridership complaints pointed to lack of safety, security, reliability, and filthy conditions.

The members of congress also felt that additional information was needed to warrant such a toll hike. They requested a cost-benefit analysis of the impact of the proposed increase in bridge tolls on the average daily driver of these affected Bay Area bridges, a plan for independent oversight of both the distribution of funds by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to the Bay Area transit agencies and the usage of funds by Bay Area transit agencies, as well as an analysis of which transit agencies will receive support from these funds and their areas of service, compared to the drivers that pay the tolls. They also wanted to know the impact of this type of short-term funding source on finding sustainable long-term solutions, without substantial external aid/bailouts (including emergency federal aid), to support the operations of Bay Area transit agencies, and requested an impact analysis of low-income or car-dependent commuters.

According to DeSaulnier's website, "The letter has received support from The Bay Area Council. 'The Bay Area Council, which has led and supported numerous major investments in transportation over the generations strongly opposes SB-532,' said Jim Wunderman, Bay Area Council President and CEO. 'Before yet again asking motorists to dig deep and pay more tolls, let's have a complete and honest review of our region's transit system, and ensure that we are delivering on reliability, efficiency, safety and connectivity among the 27 operating agencies. The public deserves nothing less.'"

Lafayette Art & Wine Festival



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