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Construction work in Orinda



Construction has begun on the transformation of the old Bank of America building in downtown Orinda.



Peets and Nation's get new facades, planned when Nation's moved across the street. Photos Sora O'Doherty

Two developments approved for downtown Orinda are now moving forward with construction, having secured the necessary permits. The former Bank of America building at 31 Orinda Way in Orinda Village is being turned into a two-story building, with plans for three restaurants downstairs and offices on the second floor. Project developer Ben Zarrin of Paymun Real Estate Design & Development, plans to move his offices to the new build-

ing from 25 Orinda Way. Across the highway, the old façade on Peets Coffee and Nation's Giant Hamburgers is being replaced with a new design, approved last year. The design change came after Nation's moved across Moraga Way from number 76 to number 65. Nation's shares the building with Peets and the new façade will be in the same style for both businesses. There will also be a new, elevated and lighted sign for Nation's.—Sora O'Doherty

Initial candidate nomination period for November election closes

By Sora O'Doherty

A sufficient number of nominations have been finalized to fill all of the open positions in Lamorinda schools and councils, but some nomination periods will be extended because an incumbent didn't choose to run again.

That won't apply to the Moraga Orinda Fire District, as both incumbents, John Jex and Craig Jorgens, will be running for reelection. No other candidates filed for those positions.

However, the nomi-

nation period will be extended to Aug. 14 for the councils of Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda, the Orinda Union School District Board, as well as the Acalanes Union High School District.

At the close of initial nomination period, Lafayette had four people running for three open council member positions of four years and one two-year term. Those filing papers are incumbents John McCormick, Carl Anduri, and Gina Dawson. Also

running is Lauren McCabe Herpich.

Orinda mayor Darlene Gee is running for reelection, and two other candidates have qualified for the ballot: Cara R. Hoxie, current member of the Orinda Union School District Board, and Candace T. Evans. Inga Miller is not running for reelection.

In Moraga, at the close of the nomination period, there were only two candidates for the three open positions on the Town Council, but

the date for nominations will be extended until Aug. 14. Currently, Brian Dolan and Lisa Maglio are qualified as candidates.

Two seats on the governing board of the Acalanes Union High School District garnered six candidates by the end of Aug. 9, but one who had pulled nomination papers did not return them. Those candidates who are qualified include incumbent Wendy Reicher. Peter Catalano, Sibyl Minighini, Stacey

Schweppe, and Paul Chopra also qualified as candidates. Incumbent Christopher Grove is not running for reelection.

Orinda Union School Board District incumbent Hillary Weiner is running for reelection, and will be joined on the ballot by Vinita Anantavat for the two open positions on the board. Incumbent Cara Hoxie is not running for reelection, but is running for the Orinda City Council.

In Moraga, there are three candidates for the

two open positions on the School Board, Stephanie Dickerson, Gian Panetta and Lee Hays. Incumbents Janelle Chng and Richard Severy are not running for reelection.

By the end of the initial nomination period, Jon Deane and Alida Maria Smit had qualified to run for two vacant positions on the Lafayette School Board. As no incumbent is running for reelection, that nomination period will also be extended.

Orinda teen Raul Dial stars in award-winning feature film "Didi"

By Emma Wong



Photo courtesy Raul Dial

Teen actor and Orinda local Raul Dial interviews for "Didi" (2024).

For many, the act of stepping onstage is terrifying. But for teen actor Raul Dial, the spotlight is only the start.

The rising senior at Miramonte High School starred in "Didi," the summer comedy-drama highlighting a coming-of-age Asian American story. The movie was critically acclaimed, winning several awards at the Sundance Film Festival.

Dial's acting career began early at Sleepy Hollow Elementary School, playing musical roles like Charlie Bucket from "Willy Wonka" and "Peter Pan." "I've always loved the excitement and nervousness that comes with performance," Dial

said.

Dial's talent continued to flourish into his junior year of high school, when prime opportunity struck with Didi's casting call. "My preschool teacher from Fremont posted this casting call on Facebook. My mom happened to see her post and asked if I wanted to go for it," Dial said. "I replied, 'Of course!'"

After multiple auditions, Dial's performance led him to obtain the role in his first-ever movie. In "Didi," he plays Fahad Mahmood, who is the protagonist, Chris Wang's, best friend.

"Fahad is this funny guy that's a little crazy, but a good storyteller,"

Dial said. "He's fun to be around and has a great time with his friends."

Indeed, Fahad and Chris have the time of their lives being typical teenagers. Their mischief is exemplified by the opening scene, in which they blow up a mailbox and upload a video of their prank to YouTube.

"Didi" was directed by Oscar-winning director Sean Wang, who was raised in Fremont. The film centers around an adolescent Chris, who grapples with his relationship to his immigrant mother while trying to fit in with Fahad and the teenage social scene.

The filming process required immense teamwork. "There were countless people involved in every job, with each being just as important as the next," Dial said.

To this team effort, Dial brought his best acting foot forward. His greatest knack stems from his improvisation. "I've been told that my improv skills and ability to stay in the moment during a scene are my strengths," Dial said.

Starring in his first film taught Dial the value of independence and self-initiative. "I've learned how to trust myself more," Dial said.

"The first time I was on set, I was pretty nervous. But now, I know that if I studied the lines and scene, I'd do just fine."

Of course, any good film needs a cast with rapport. "The best part about filming was meeting new people," Dial said. "I made close

friends, like Izaak Wang, who plays Chris; and Aaron Chang, who plays another friend, Jimmy," Dial said.

Like puzzle pieces, Dial and his new castmates fell into place with one another, completing "Didi's" chemistry-laden cast. "Since Raul and I interact as best friends, our interactions required lots of improv," Aaron Chang said. "But everything came naturally because we were friends in real life too."

In acting, Dial's castmates had much to say about his skill. "Raul is such a grounded and funny actor," costar Alyssia Simmons said. "He's a natural and gives other actors things to work off of."

The castmates made lasting memories, whether or not the footage made the final

cut. "My favorite memory with Raul was when we planned to push him and some other cast members into the pool," Simmons said.

In January, "Didi" premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, UT. It won both the Audience Award and Best Ensemble Award.

"I was nervous seeing myself on-screen for the first time at Sundance, but I was excited as well since we'd all worked so hard," Dial said. "We were ecstatic when it won two awards."

Dial cherishes the "Didi" experience and hopes to further hone his acting prowess. "It's been surreal looking back on how far "Didi" has come, and I'm grateful to have played Fahad," Dial said. "Look-

ing forward, I want to work towards learning the Meisner technique, which helps you react naturally to anything happening during a scene."

Sundance propelled "Didi" to the national movie scene, and the film was released in mainstream theaters on July 26. It has garnered widespread praise for its heartfelt portrayal of the adolescent spirit: confused and reckless, yet adventurous and daring.

"I think people will love how relatable the film is," Dial said. "No matter how old you are, everyone has been a teenager."

"Didi" was released in the Orinda Theatre on Aug. 9, after which Dial did an in-person Q&A. With the film's release, locals can look out for his rise to stardom.

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