

THE ORINDA NEWS

Gratis
Volume 25, Number 2

The Orinda Association, Publisher
Delivered to 9,000 Households and Businesses in Orinda

12 Issues Annually
February 2010

Orinda Teen Advisory Council



SALLY HOGARTY

The young people on the Orinda Teen Advisory Council (above) believe in making a difference in their community. They have collected books for Books for the Barrios, warm clothing for the Monument Crisis Center in Concord, and are delivering stuffed animals to the patients at Children's Hospital for Valentine's Day. They will also be holding a blood drive at the Orinda Community Center on March 6, and a Teen Movie Night is scheduled for May 21. The advisory council meets the first Monday of every month at 4 p.m. in the Orinda Community Center. All teens (grades 6-12) are welcome to join.

The Year of the Tiger (Geng Yin)

Chinese New Year commences on Valentine's Day this year and brings with it the brave tiger. The third sign in the Chinese Zodiac cycle, the tiger is a courageous fighter – physically powerful, gracious, independent and brave and seeks attention and power. They can be friendly and loving but also selfish and short tempered.

Do you have a tiger in your house? *The Orinda News* will be accepting photos of your striped household "tiger" for consideration as our Tiger of the Month. To have your pet considered, please email a high resolution photo to news@orindaassociation.org by the fifth of each month.

Our "tiger" for February is fittingly Ginger, the cat which keeps Orinda Books safe and sound. Orinda Books' Marian Nielsen says that Ginger exhibits "tiger-like qualities in destruction of Christmas decorations at the store." If you would like



HEIDI RAINE

Ginger, Orinda Books "Tiger."

Ginger memorabilia, the bookstore carries postcards, bookmarks, and more.

– Sally Hogarty, Editor

Citizens Urge City to Cut Fat From Fire Budget

By MAGGIE SHARPE
Staff Writer

The organization known as F.A.I.R. (Fire and Infrastructure Renewal) presented its ideas to a packed house at the January 5 Orinda City Council meeting.

F.A.I.R., a group of some 80 citizens from Orinda and Moraga that formed a year ago, is advocating major changes to fire and ambulance service that has been provided by Moraga Orinda Fire Department (MOFD) since 1997.

At that time, Orinda broke away from Contra Costa Consolidated Fire District (ConFire) because of inadequate service. However, F.A.I.R. says the model they are now advocating would maintain the same level of service, while cutting costs.

The group is advocating that Orinda:

1. Dissolve MOFD;
2. Contract with ConFire for emergency medical, fire and rescue service; and
3. Contract with American Medical Response (AMR) for ambulance service.

According to F.A.I.R., these changes would result in a savings of \$65 million over 12 years for Orinda and \$12 million for Moraga. That money, they say, can be used for needed infrastructure projects.

"The savings from MOFD could be used to fix water pipes, sewers, roads and fire flow," says Al Resnick, a member of F.A.I.R.'s steering committee. "Excess funds are going to MOFD which could be reallocated to community safety."

Members of F.A.I.R. also point out that Orinda citizens pay 23.8 percent of their property taxes to MOFD, more than their Moraga neighbors who pay 20.5 percent. (The average in Contra Costa County is 12 percent, according to F.A.I.R.)

F.A.I.R. members propose keeping the same configuration of service as currently

exists (three fire stations in Orinda, two in Moraga; three firefighters and minimum one paramedic per truck), one ambulance in Orinda and one in Moraga, dedicated to responding to incidents in those communities.

In addition, F.A.I.R. proposes that all MOFD personnel be absorbed by ConFire.

Resnick says the first step is for the city to validate the numbers in F.A.I.R.'s proposal.

"If the numbers are right, the city can decide what to do. If the numbers are wrong, we'll just go away," says Resnick.

One person who disagrees with the numbers is MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley. In a prepared statement to the City Council, Bradley questioned the financial claims F.A.I.R. makes.

"It would appear that F.A.I.R. has underestimated the annual cost of securing

[SEE F.A.I.R. page 6]

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OYA Uniforms in South Africa



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The award-winning girls' soccer team of Huntington, South Africa proudly wears Orinda Youth Association uniforms donated through the Orinda Association.

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LIBRARY GALLERY

A Winter's Tale of Joyful Color at Library Gallery

By ELANA O'LOSKEY
Staff Writer

The Orinda Library Gallery welcomes you to this month's viewing of exciting art from members of the Oakland Art Association (OAA). The show runs from Tuesday, February 2, through the end of the month and fills the entire gallery. An artist's reception takes place February 7 from 3 – 5 p.m.

The Oakland Art Association was founded in 1957 and is now 60 strong. Several members have been active for most of its 50+ years – and they know their stuff. A well-organized and experienced group, its focus is arranging regular venues for showing member artworks; 12 regular shows each year, and additional ongoing satellite

shows at various prime locations in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Members' work ranges from paintings (watercolor, oil, acrylics), drawings, photography, collage, monoprints and etchings, to woodcuts and sculptures. Their work can be reviewed at www.oaklandart.org. If you are a local artist looking for a community of quality artists creating the kind of art that inspires, OAA says, "Come on artists, join us!"

Jennifer Kolkhorst, show chair of the juried exhibit, and longtime Orinda resident is thrilled to be returning to the Orinda Library Gallery. "The way the light plays on the sky-high walls, and the fact that anyone going to our library passes through it makes it OAA's favorite place to exhibit," she says. Kolkhorst has been experimenting



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Gisela Volkmer's watercolor entitled "Connecting" will be part of the Orinda Library Exhibit in February. She works with watercolors on yupo paper, which is pH neutral, flawlessly smooth, and recyclable. Typically, she works in 23 x 30" [SEE GALLERY page 18]

60 Years Young!
The Orinda Arts Council transformed our community during the summer of 2006 with BirdHaus, an installation of birdhouses created by more than 60 regional artists.

Were you or someone you know a volunteer or member of the OAC? If so, we're looking for you to be a part of our 2010 celebration in June honoring our past 60 years!

Please contact us at www.orindaartscouncil.org/findmembers to inform us of your (or friend's) whereabouts, or call Lisa Johannessen at 925-254-6695.

Orinda Arts Council - promoting the arts in our community since 1950

2010 Orinda Arts Council 60th ANNIVERSARY

BIRDHAUS PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION 2006

★ HIGHLIGHT #2

Classic Gregory Peck Film Comes to Orinda Theater

By SALLY HOGARTY
Editor

The California Independent Film Festival (CAIFF) follows its hit screening of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* with the groundbreaking social justice film *To Kill A Mockingbird* on February 13 at 4 and 7 p.m.

Oscar nominee Mary Badham, who portrayed the young Scout, is the special guest of honor. A question and answer session with the actress will take place following the movie. Badham had no prior acting experience when, at the age of 9, she was chosen for the role of Scout, a role for which she won an Oscar nomination for best supporting actress. "There were 4,000 children from the South auditioning. Many had prepared monologues, but my mom, who was a local community theater actress, thought it would be best if I didn't prepare anything," recalls Badham. Badham says that the movie studios were resistant to the controversial nature of the film until Gregory Peck signed on to the project. "He was such a wonderful person, like a father to me, and a very dear friend," adds Badham.

Performing in the movie based on Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel has had



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Gregory Peck as Atticus and Mary Badham as Scout.

a continuing influence on Badham's life. She remained in close contact with Gregory Peck and occasionally accompanied him on his lecture tours and continues to lecture audiences internationally. "We may have different views, but it is the acceptance of these differences that will make us better individuals," says Badham.

Tickets for February 13 can be purchased at the Orinda Theater or online at www.caiff.org. All ages welcome.

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ORINDA ASSOCIATION

A Message From the OA President
Things We Take for Granted



Mark Roberts

During the holidays, I was reminded about the essential nature of something nearly all of us take for granted: the use of wonderfully opposable thumbs on both hands.

Let me explain. The Sunday after Christmas, I was home in the kitchen trying to open a bottle that had been sealed with wax. As I was using a very sharp (and inappropriate) knife to cut up one side of the bottle and across the top, I thought to myself, "Gee, I'd better be careful as I cut down the other side because my thumb is - OUCH!"

Yes, the inside of my left thumb was directly in the path of the out of control knife. Fortunately, I was standing right next to the kitchen sink which provided both cold water for the wound and a drain for the blood. Next stop, the emergency room at Kaiser in Walnut Creek. After a surprisingly brief and not-too-painful visit, I left with two layers of stitches and a splint almost up to my elbow to immobilize my thumb and wrist since I'd managed to nick a tendon.

By the next morning, I was learning the consequences of my carelessness. Certain aspects of dressing myself were much more

difficult. And tying my shoes was impossible without being able to grip the laces tightly with both hands which requires the use of fingers and opposable thumbs - two of them. Thank goodness for slip-ons!

Two weeks later, as I write this column, my thumb is healing nicely. I can easily move the whole thumb but am supposed to refrain from bending the middle joint for a few more days - which makes sense since it still hurts. The scar tissue that is forming will be a lasting reminder to not take the use of two wonderful thumbs for granted.

There's an annual event here in Orinda that none of us should take for granted either. It's our community's Fourth of July parade and celebration. It has happened every year for 27 years and I thank all the volunteers from the OA and other organizations that have made it possible. The OA board, Mayor Tom McCormick, Past Mayor Sue Severson, city staff members and other volunteers are planning this year's event - which we want to be really special since we're celebrating the 25th anniversary of Orinda's incorporation.

Based on the thousands of Orinda residents and friends who attend the parade and activities in the park every Fourth of July, I

wouldn't suggest that most folks take the event itself for granted. I do believe, however, that most folks do take all the work and time donated by volunteers who plan and present the event for granted.

To put it bluntly, that has to change. I'm asking OA members and all Orinda residents to think about what they can do to make this year's celebration the best ever. Believe me, you enjoy an event so much more if you've contributed to making it happen. It really is a pride of ownership issue. And we need more owners this year - actually, right now!

Please visit the OA's website - www.orindaassociation.org - for more info, email your "sign me up" message to oa@orindaassociation.org, call the OA office at 254-0800, or visit the Volunteer Center on the plaza level of the library. Become an owner of this year's Fourth of July (and Orinda's 25th anniversary) celebration TODAY and make your commitment to not taking one of our community's great events for granted.



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The Orinda Association is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to:

- Maintaining and improving the quality of life in Orinda;
- Promoting awareness and discussion of issues that are important to the community;
- Encouraging and recognizing volunteer efforts to enhance the beauty, character, and security of Orinda.

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Wishing You a Happy Valentine's Day and a Prosperous Year of the Tiger

Lots to celebrate this month with Chinese New Year falling on Valentine's Day. To honor the Year of the Tiger, we would like to feature your household "tigers" on the cover of *The Orinda News* each month and encourage you to email a high resolution jpeg to news@orindaassociation.org.

We also would like to celebrate our

wonderful advertisers. Thanks to their continued support and that of our publisher, the Orinda Association, we are able to offer the community this free newspaper. We encourage you to patronize our advertisers and have added a list of these businesses on this page. Gung Hay Fat Choi!

— Sally Hogarty, Editor

Letters to the Editor

Leaf Blowers a Health Threat

Leaf blower noise is more than "annoying" as written in a letter to the editor of December 31. It disturbs the peace and creates air pollution. Leaf blowers move air at about 180 to 220 miles per hour; they cause particulate matter to be suspended in the air for up to three days. These very small harmful particles are inhaled into our lungs. Particulate matter contains toxic chemicals, fungi, spores and even animal fecal matter. The prolific use of leaf blowers in Orinda causes a public health danger to our residents.

The noise in Orinda is out of control. When I moved to beautiful Orinda, I didn't think I would be subject to chronic noise and air pollution from leaf blowers! I avoided communities near airports, freeway, or factories.

I am forced to be inside when the "debris blowers" are being used, which is every day in Orinda. Not that being indoors protects me – I can hear the shrieking sound of the leaf blowers inside my home, and the dust still gets inside the house. The noise made by leaf blowers causes an elevation in my blood pressure and stress level. Well documented, this response to sounds that annoy is called the "fight or flight" mechanism. For me, breathing is now a challenge since I have developed respiratory problems from all the dust particles.

The topography of Orinda is hilly making noise travel. That means leaf blowers can be heard as if they are being used next door, when they are actually hundreds of feet away. This makes it hard to ask neighbors to stop using leaf blowers as suggested in a previous letter to the editor. I believe a ban would be easy to enforce, because there would be no questions about what time they

can be used. They just can't be used.

I know that many homeowners in Orinda maintain their own yards. I am included in this group – I use a rake and broom. It isn't that hard to gather the acorns, leaves, pine cones and twigs that fall onto the ground and put them into the green composting can.

Residents in Orinda should consider that over 100 cities in California have taken action against the use of leaf blowers. Protect the health of the residents living in Orinda. Follow the leads of towns like Carmel, Berkeley, Piedmont, Mill Valley and Tiburon.

— Susan Kendall

Leaf Blowers Helpful

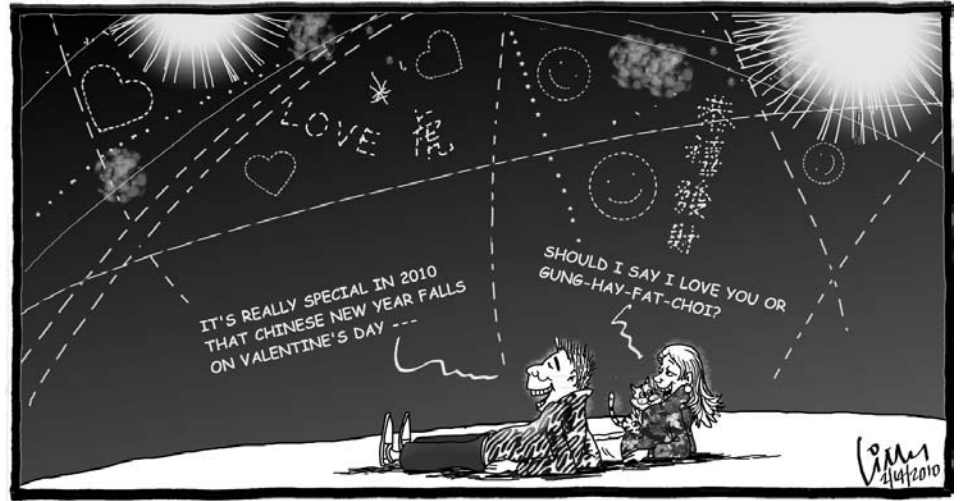
Several recent letters from Orinda residents who employ "lawn services" have advocated banning leaf blowers from Orinda on the grounds that their noise is insufferable. Apparently, I'm one of the few who cleans his own driveway and gutters with a leaf blower, not hiring someone to do it. I comply with the Orinda ordinance as to when to use my blower and use a rake for small jobs. However, using a rake for my large driveway, and cleaning my gutters by hand, would be a mammoth undertaking that would need to be repeated every week, something for which I have neither the time nor the energy. I sympathize with those who object to the blowers but would ask for some understanding for those of us who do not have the luxury of a "lawn service." I'm surrounded by neighbors with dogs who bark at all hours, but I've seen no one advocate the banishment of dogs from Orinda. We live in a semi-rural setting that makes the use of blowers very helpful and encourages the ownership of dogs. They're both noisy, but with a little courtesy and understanding, I'm sure we can all enjoy living in Orinda. Perhaps we could compromise by banning lawn services from using blowers, but please let me have mine.

— Michael Bruce

Electric Blowers Quiet and Non-polluting

In answer to the people who wish to ban blowers, may I suggest that they encourage buying electric blowers instead. To ban blowers altogether is ridiculous. There is more noise from roads, freeways, aircraft,

[SEE LETTERS page 18]



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Editor's Correction

In the January issue of *The Orinda News*, it was reported that Volunteer of the Year Terry Murphy received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star during his service in Vietnam. According to Murphy, he was not publicly awarded the two medals mentioned and does not want to take credit for them. "To me, everyone I served with was and is a hero, and it matters not that some of what we did will never be known," he says.

The Orinda News prints 9,000 copies and is published 12 times a year by The Orinda Association. The office is located at 26 Orinda Way (lower level of the Library). All rights reserved. The publication is sent out by direct mail (Permit #4, Orinda Post Office) and distributed to key locations throughout the city.

Editor..... Sally Hogarty
 Advertising Representatives..... Jill Gelster, Elana O'Loskey, Marie Waterman
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 Graphics.....Aspen Consulting: Jill Gelster & David Dierks
 Printing.....Folger Graphics

The Orinda News

A Publication of
 The Orinda Association
 Mailing Address
 P.O. Box 97
 Orinda, California 94563
 Telephone: 925 254-0800
 Fax: 925 254-8312
www.orindanews.org



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Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis and should be no longer than 400 words. They must include the writer's first and last name, signature and telephone number.

Send letters to: Editor, *The Orinda News*, P.O. Box 97, Orinda, CA 94563, fax them to 254-8312, or email to news@orindaassociation.org. Letters to the Editor for the March issue are due February 5, 2009.

For display advertising rates, call Jill Gelster at 925-528-9225 or email to jill@aspenconsult.net. The deadline for the April issue is February 15, 2010.

CAR TIME / POLICE BLOTTER

CAR TIME

Motor Oils are Not Created Equal

by JEFF JOYCE



Cars and trucks produced in the last 10 years are built better and made to last longer than ever. We have alternative fuel vehicles, such as hybrids, electric, cylinder canceling, and others not too far away. But with all of this interest in fuel economy, lower emissions and longevity, certainly one must wonder what's different about engine oil. We see longer oil change intervals, with some manufacturers stretching the interval out to 10,000 miles. Wow! Who would have ever thought a 10,000 mile oil change interval? But it's true. In order to reach these new longer service intervals, lower emissions, and longer engine life, one of the key elements is your engine oil.

We now have a 0W/20 oil used in hybrid engines and now on a few 2008 and up gasoline engine vehicles. The emission control and oiling system are critical to maximizing the full hybrid benefit. The sad part of this is that a number of service facilities do not carry the 0W/20 oil, so they substitute it with either 10W/30 or 5W/30, which by using this wrong type of oil will create the potential for catastrophic failures and expenses. Engine performance and emission control systems are very sensitive to the use of these specific oil grades. Review your owners manual and make note of the recommended oil for your vehicle.

There are many manufacturers now requiring the use of synthetic oils. There are over 40 models of vehicles now produced that require synthetic oil to maintain their warranty. Synthetic oils are refined using crude oil base stocks, which are then blended with synthetic products, to produce

an oil that bonds to metal components superbly so that during cold starts, the critical upper engine components are not starved for lubrication until the oil flows throughout the engine. Another benefit is the synthetic oils allow the engine to crank easily, reducing the burden on your vehicle's battery in the cold. Imagine leaving a bottle of honey in the refrigerator overnight and then trying to pour it. Motor oil doesn't get that thick, but on very cold mornings, it does take a while to warm up. Any vehicle can use synthetic oil and enjoy the same results.

Most manufacturers require oil rated "SM" by the API (American Petroleum Institute) with the "Starburst" symbol. Remember, many quick lubes are not using the preferred oil for today's cars. Never be lured to a shop just on price. Chances are the money you may save now, could end up costing much more later.

Your vehicle sets you back a big chunk of change. Why wouldn't you spend a little more to give it the proper attention? Ask questions regarding your engine oil and be sure you trust your vehicle to a reputable, qualified facility that has the experience and ability to address your vehicles' service needs.

Signups for Adult Softball

The league plays during the summer months on Moraga and Orinda fields. All games start at 6:30 p.m. Playoffs in August. If you would like to assemble and/or sign up a team, please call Tom Boyden, Adult Sports Coordinator, at (925) 253-4216.



POLICE BLOTTER

December 2009

False Residential Alarms: Officers responded to 98 false alarm calls throughout the city.

Auto Burglary (theft from a locked vehicle): 1 incident reported on Bates Blvd. at Davis Rd.

Commercial Burglary: 1 incident reported on Glorietta Blvd.

Residential Burglary: 1 incident reported on Via Hermosa.

Grand Theft (theft of more than \$400 value): 3 incidents reported in Theatre Square, and on Charles Hill Rd. and Broadview Terrace.

Petty Theft From Vehicle (theft of less than \$400 value from an unlocked vehicle): 2 incidents were reported on El Toyonal and Charles Hill Rd.

Petty Theft - All Other: 1 incident was reported on Camino Sobrante.

Strongarm Robbery: 1 robbery was reported on Camino Pablo.

Vandalism: 3 incidents reported on Lombardy Ln., El Toyonal and Orinda Way.

Arrests

Alcohol - Drunk in public: 1 arrest was made on Camino Pablo.

Driving Under the Influence: 4 arrests were made: 2 on St Stephens Dr., La Cresta Rd. at Woodland Rd. and Lomas Cantadas at Los Venados.

Recovered Stolen Vehicle: 2 vehicles were recovered on Lost Valley Dr. and Monterey Terrace.

Strongarm Robbery: 1 arrest was made on Camino Pablo.

Vandalism: 1 arrest was made on El Toyonal.

Warrant Arrests: 1 arrest was made on Moraga Way and Northwood Dr.

Weapon - Possession of Destructive Device: 1 arrest was made on Ivy Dr.

Note: The Orinda Police Department reminds residents not to leave valuables in their cars and to lock cars at all times. They are also reminded to always turn on home alarm systems even when leaving for only a short time. With your help, we can reduce auto and home thefts.

- Compiled by Jeanette Irving, Orinda Police Department

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LUKE SASSANO

Orinda Native and Pro Soccer Player Tries to Help Others

By SALLY HOGARTY
Editor

Luke Sassano learned his lessons well—study hard, workout even harder, get ahead, and then help others do the same. The Miramonte High School graduate and defensive midfielder for the New York Red Bulls was one of 53 athletes who competed in the Athletes for Hope “Who Gives? Racing for a Cause” competition, which ended in mid-January. Each athlete chose an organization to receive the money he/she raised in pledges. Sassano choose

CHF International (Cooperative Housing Foundation).

The international development and humanitarian assistance organization focuses on providing education support to more than 45,000 orphaned and vulnerable children in Rwanda. “I am very excited and honored to be working with CHF International and Athletes for Hope on the Racing for a Cause campaign,” says Sassano. “Working with CHF really appealed to me personally because of the many youth projects they have around the world. The initiative to

get Rwandan child headed households and orphans into local schools so that their lives can turn in a positive direction is greatly needed.” Sassano recalls how fortunate he was to receive an excellent education in Orinda and later at UC Berkeley. “These children are not so lucky. They have been greatly affected by genocide and HIV. They need our help,” he adds.

Following his graduation from Miramonte, Sassano played for UC Berkeley, where he served as team captain and was named All Pac-10 Honorable Mention in 2005. He was drafted by the New York Red Bulls in the third round of the 2008 MLS SuperDraft. A versatile player, who can play both midfielder and defender, he earned his place in the starting XI during the Red Bulls 2008 playoff run. He made his MLS debut against Columbus on April 5 in the 2008 season opener. Sassano played in 18 games, starting 11 of them, in the regular 2008 season and started in all four



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Miramonte grad Luke Sassano, #32 on the New York Red Bulls, battles for the ball.

playoff games as the Red Bulls made it all the way to the MLS Cup Final.

Off the field, Sassano volunteers his own time at the Jubilee Center in Hoboken, an [SEE Sassano page 16]

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◆ FAIR from page 1

contractual fire suppression services from ConFire by over \$4 million,” said Bradley, who went into detail about ConFire and MOFD operating budgets and why he felt F.A.I.R.’s figures were inaccurate.

City Councilmember Victoria Smith is also skeptical about F.A.I.R.’s proposal to contract with ConFire and the role of LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission). She views it as a potential loss of Orinda’s autonomy and tax dollars too.

“I think the threat of LAFCO taking us into a regional agency is very real,” said Smith, who added that she supports the formation of a sub-committee to explore a dialogue between Orinda and Moraga. “But I caution about the wolf coming up behind us, because that’s the county.”

LAFCO is a state-mandated organization with a commission in every county that oversees everything from city governments to fire and water districts, according to Contra Costa LAFCO commissioner David Pieho. He says the idea that LAFCO is going to force Orinda into anything is just false.

“The beauty of government is not having to force things, the beauty of government is to give people information so that they can make an educated decision,” says Pieho. He says it’s also erroneous that LAFCO has the power to redirect Orinda’s tax dollars into Contra Costa County coffers. “It’s not in our state mandate,” says Pieho. “It’s not legal.”

Pieho says that, while LAFCO has a lot of power, they rarely initiate change in cit-

ies or districts. “We like to be the shepherd in the decision-making process, but we’re not the applicant,” he says. However Pieho added that Orinda is not an island and that the city already uses ConFire for dispatch services. “If the county fails, we all fail, nobody stands alone,” says Pieho. “We all have to work together.” According to Pieho, LAFCO is currently reviewing all Contra Costa County fire districts, because of concerns about fire district budget shortfalls in the near future, but not eyeing MOFD in particular.

Mayor Thomas McCormick says Orinda, Moraga and MOFD are in the process of reviewing F.A.I.R.’s proposal and will then determine if it is a workable solution to saving tax dollars.

“The group appears to be very smart and dedicated to helping Orinda citizens utilize all their tax dollars in the best possible manner,” says McCormick. “The question is can Orinda and Moraga be better served by restructuring MOFD or should MOFD be left as currently structured? Once the representatives meet and a thorough review and vetting of ideas and information is completed, then recommendations can be presented.”

F.A.I.R. plans a presentation to MOFD on February 3. Additional information on the presentation is on the group’s website.

For information on F.A.I.R., visit www.fairfororinda.org; for information on LAFCO, visit www.contracostalafco.org; for a complete transcript of Chief Bradley’s response to F.A.I.R.’s proposal, visit www.mofd.org.

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TRAVEL SIMPLIFIED

Armchair Travel with Friends – Save Time and Money

By KSENIJA SOSTER OLMER
Staff Writer

Remember the excitement of picking up the developed photos from your last trip and savoring the memories of special moments captured on film? Perhaps you then also put the photos in an album and shared them proudly with friends and family. With the digital photography and instant gratification of seeing the shot captured on the screen, some of that joy and sharing of the memories is gone. Of course, for the very organized amongst us there are great technological advances of putting your photos online for everyone to see, or even printing a coffee table book of your trip through many different Internet services. But who does that, really? I am too busy planning my next trip.

A group of Lamorinda AAUW (American Association of University Women) members and their spouses have found a way to relive and share their travel pictures and memories with their fellow travel buffs. Each month one of them hosts a travel night and prepares a presentation on a particular trip, country or destination. Last year, their armchair travels took them to Iran, Southern Africa, Bhutan, Iceland, Spain, Italy, Dubai, Jordan, India, Ireland, Tibet, China and Guatemala.



(L-R) Mirek Olmer, Kay and Gunther DeGrott, and Mary-Leigh Miller look over a photo album. All are members of the AAUW International Travel Group.

As the year progressed, the evenings became more elaborate and more fun. Maps and books were added, new equipment purchased, and regional wines and food were provided by the rest of the members of the group. Savoring the tastes, textiles, artifacts, and music from the trip enriched the visual feast of slides and videos.

The spouses of the AAUW were happy to join the group. Says Carl Walker of Orinda, "It is a great opportunity for us guys, who

are otherwise a bit sidelined, to meet some wonderful members of the organization and their husbands. We have a lot of fun, and we learn a lot, too."

Members share their photos and also organizational tips on traveling, recommendations on travel providers, as well as technical expertise or new information on services, like where to digitize old slides at the best price, or how to make a DVD. They also inspire the group members to

make new travel plans.

"We have always loved to travel," exclaims Cayo Marchner of Moraga, who, with her husband, just returned from a trip to Australia and New Zealand. "We were so glad when the international travel interest group in AAUW was instigated because we enjoy the opportunity to hear about others' travels, some to places we've never been, others to places we may never visit. We also enjoy revisiting those places we've been to from another traveler's perspective." Then she adds, "Oh, and let's not forget the food -- the food is always delicious! I like the idea of trying to make food from the featured country - searching for and trying recipes was a trip in itself!"

Adds Gunther De Groot of Moraga, "My wife and I were fortunate to spend a large portion of our lives living and working abroad, so it gives us great pleasure to share our international adventures with other likewise-oriented people. The gastronomical element is also wonderful. We have a very international cooking palette at our house, and we enjoy sharing new tastes with others."

Travel photos are, of course, the mainstay of the evening and the group has some outstanding amateur photographers.

[SEE TRAVEL page 16]

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When Times Get Tough, the Tough Get Marketing

By Christine Temple-Wolfe
 Contributing Writer

The key to success in the midst of a recession is for businesses to improve their marketing strategies. Here are five key tips that can help small and midsize businesses make significant strides – even during the worst of economic times.

Utilize this time to take inventory – what

has worked in the past and what hasn't. Make a list of what you have done over the past 24 months that has worked and what hasn't. List the tool, what it cost you, and what the return was. The Return On Investment (ROI) will be the amount you spent on hard and soft costs divided by what the converted customers spend with you. This ROI will vary by tactic. So document your seminars, tradeshow and television appearances. In marketing, there is no magic bullet. The success of your programs depends on many variables, including: timing, creativity, target list, and format.

Research what your competitors are doing. Go online and search by key terms that your customers might use to find your products and services. Go to each website that is comparable to what you provide. See how they are packaging their product and service offering. See what tools they are utilizing (PowerPoint, whitepapers, downloadable pdfs, videos etc). Walk to competitors' business sites and see what visuals they use; document their exposure (i.e. chamber functions, rotary, professional groups – Meetup.com, LinkedIn.com, Facebook). If they have a presence somewhere, you should evaluate being there too!

Be innovative. What businesses do your customers frequent? Look at your existing customers. Put them in categories based on their spending with you and the frequency at which they spend. Your best customers, we'll call Group A. Your second best customers, we'll call Group B, and so on. Just list four groups, A, B, C, D. Then look at the attributes of each group. What age ranges, where do they live, how many children do they have, etc. Document any commonalities within each group. How often they buy online, or shop in-store. Your

objective is to identify key behaviors that differentiate each group. You want to learn about their lifestyle, key priorities in life, or stages of life (i.e. young business, just married, having children, starting a business, retiring). Your goal is to communicate to each group in a way that hits core messages important to them at their stage of life. If you have no information on any of your customers, you can begin collecting this data by surveying them, or buy it from a credible list partner. You want to highlight key values and offerings that appeal to them based on what is important to them – not what is important to you.

Ask your customers what they do and don't like about your offering. Write up some questions that you feel would be helpful in understanding your customers and how they perceive your product or service. Your objective is to understand how they see you versus how you want to be seen or understood. Is there a large gap? If so, you need to improve your communications and messaging strategies. You want to create questions that help you improve your creation, delivery, nurturing of products or services. Some questions might include:

- How do you typically shop for x?
- Have you ever heard of list competitors?
- What made you choose company A?
- Was your decision based on location, price, service, convenience, or recommendations from others?
- Would you recommend my product or service to others? If no why? If yes, why?
- What could we do better to make your purchase of our products and services better?

Ask tough questions and take your ego out of it. Businesses that aren't afraid to hear what is going wrong have a far greater chance of survival.

Re-package, re-position and test. Once you have information on your competitors and you better understand what your customers think of you, you are ready to test different strategies to move your product or service in greater volume and with greater success. Bundling your products or services differently, depending on your customers needs, is critical. Let's say you are a financial advisor. Are your competitors having cocktail parties or small gatherings at restaurants to provide financial advice to larger groups of people for a reduced cost? How can you get in front of people and provide advice? If your customers say you aren't affordable, then keep your profit margins, but add something extra for your customer so they see the value in their investment. If you focus on what the customer needs versus what you are selling, you will be successful.

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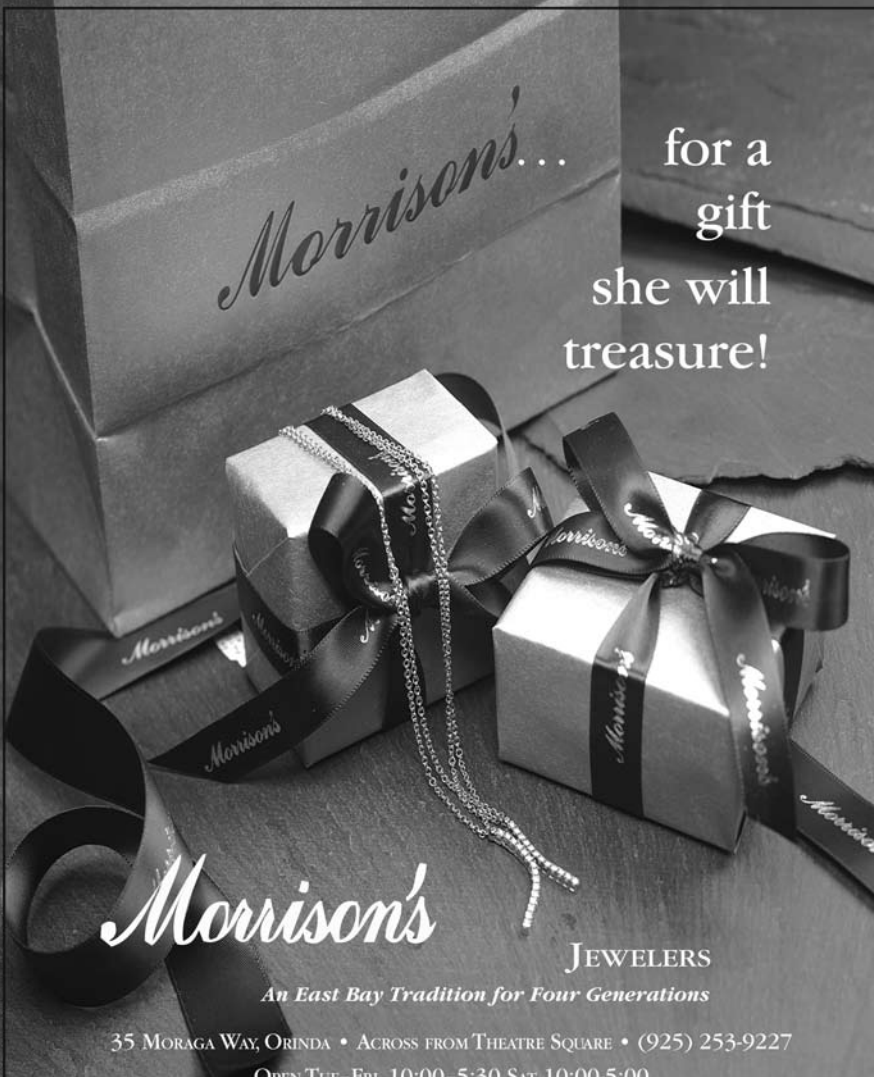


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A HEALTHY NEW YEAR

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■ A Good Time for T'ai Chi Ch'uan

By MARILYN COOPER
Contributing Writer

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is considered 600 years old and means "Grand Ultimate Fist." It evolved from Shaolin Kung Fu. Shaolin proceeded Tai Chi in the history of Chinese martial arts by about 1,000 years.

Far older than either of these is Qigong, the pure healing art, which predates written history and is considered 6,000 years old. Tai Chi is the integration of qigong and kung fu, both healing and martial. Qigong is usually taught in conjunction with Tai Chi.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan increases circulation, flexibility, strength, bone density, balance, immunity, awareness, and good spirits. The continuous slowness distinguishes Tai Chi from all other types of exercise. While Yoga holds and relaxes into each pose, Tai Chi flows from one posture into the next, requiring a more alert and poised state.

Tai Chi engages the mind and body in equal measure. The mind directs the body to move in accordance with specific guidelines -- a slow, constant pace with the weight sunk, the body very relaxed, and the stepping light. The mind has time to reflect on each movement as it is occurring. The heightening awareness produces a deeply meditative experience. Students develop

strength, grace and self-control without straining or risking injury.

The initial learning stages are mentally challenging. The dropout ratio in Tai Chi compared to Pilates or Yoga is staggering. The few who remain reap incomparable rewards -- longevity, protection from illness, injury and assault, and a practice that integrates the spiritual with the physical.

Like learning a new (body) language, once there is a basic vocabulary, the mind/body can express things that would've been inconceivable without Tai Chi training -- the ability to respond to pressure without resisting, and to move said force or pressure in the direction it was going.

Tai Chi can be practiced anywhere and at any time of day. All that is needed is a small space, a desire to feel better and the understanding that one can heal, elevate and strengthen her or himself at will. This process is called "Cultivating Qi."

I have used Tai Chi as a primary practice in my 40s, 50s and now 60s. My form has improved over the decades, as has my energy levels, and general health, making my old age vibrant and exciting. I look forward to sharing my "qi" and knowledge with people of all ages and fitness levels.

Marilyn Cooper is an international gold medalist in Tai Chi. She teaches classes at the Orinda Community Center and In Forma Health Club. For more information, call 925-818-8155 or go to www.littleriverwest.com.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Marilyn Cooper demonstrates the "Low Tiger" pose in celebration of Chinese New Year, the Year of the Tiger, which falls on February 14 this year.

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PETER RITTER

Local Resident Finds Four Legs Better Than Two

By MOYA STONE
Staff Writer

Peter Ritter's clients can be kind of noisy. Sometimes they need a bath. On occasion, they've even been known to snap. But a little smell and nip is all good for this Lamorinda resident who has found his niche as a pet sitter.

After leaving a long and successful career in the insurance industry, Ritter took some time to ponder his next step. At the time, he was helping neighbors now and again with their pets. Eventually, he had one of those "aha" moments and realized this is what he wanted to do – as a profession. In 2005, he opened his very first business, Animal House Pet and Home Care. He quickly became a hero to Lamorinda pet owners by offering dependable pet care of all kinds. Ritter provides a variety of services, including daily dog walks, shuttles to the vet, and administering medications. "It's a huge responsibility," says Ritter, a

tall man with a friendly, bearded face, "and I take it seriously."

That he does. Approaching his business with corporate savvy, Ritter spent time researching the pet sitting businesses. He read books, talked to people, and joined the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters. The result is a polished and organized website and a long list of clients, many of them referred from the Orinda Veterinary Clinic. Long time employee of Orinda Veterinary Clinic Hollis Brock often sends patients to Ritter. "I feel very comfortable referring Peter because he's good with people as well as animals," says Brock.

Ritter visits all new clients and owners in their homes armed with forms and information sheets. He asks detailed questions about the pet's routine, likes and dislikes, and special needs, and records the answers so he knows exactly what's required for each individual pet. Ritter says he also likes



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Peter Ritter drives his "clients" around as a normal part of his day.

to get to know the people. "It's equally important to me to establish a relationship with the pet owner," he explains. "It personalizes things." He is insured and bonded and belongs to the Small Business Association. On top of that, Ritter has a kind and compassionate manner, putting pets and their owners at ease.

Supporting Peter in his venture is his wife Colleen. The couple relocated to the Bay Area from Texas 10 years ago. Originally from Toronto, they immediately fell in love

with Lamorinda and the fabulous climate. "We're so lucky to live in this lovely area," says Colleen, who works full time at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, but occasionally helps Peter with his clients when needed.

For Peter and Colleen, there is no downside to pet sitting but, if pressed, they might admit they never have a day off. Peter works seven days a week and the busiest times are holidays – Thanksgiving through New Year's and spring break. "There's something happening every day," says Peter. "But there are quieter days," says Colleen. And on those days, the couple gets to take their own dog, a young Eurasier called Kai, out for a long hike.

Over the past four years, Peter has cared for a 100 year-old tortoise, numerous cats and dogs of all ages and sizes, chickens, rabbits, birds, fish and a lizard. He draws the line at livestock. Owners range from professionals who need their dogs walked during the day, to housebound elderly people who need Ritter to take their pets to the vet. He has administered pills and fluids, and more than once has taken pets to emergency care.

"It's very gratifying to have people say they can go away and not worry," says Peter. "That's what I'm striving for."



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Six Stunning Kitchens Featured on Orinda Tour

By PAT RUDEBUSCH
Contributing Writer

It's been said that the kitchen is the heart of the home, and for good reason. From the sweet aroma of cookies in the oven to friendly talks around the table, the kitchen provides us with comfort, nurture and memories. On February 10, six Orinda families open their doors for the Second Annual Orinda Heart of the Home Kitchen Tour benefiting Miramonte High School's Class of 2010.

Lisa Jorgens, one of the tour's organizers and senior class parent representative, says that each of the kitchens on this year's tour reflects the homeowners' love of cooking and entertaining as well as their fine attention to detail.

Among the kitchens featured is that of Rhydonia Ring and Gary Curtis. Ring is a professionally trained cook who has studied at the Culinary Institute of America, as well as at cooking schools in New York and France. Hers is truly a cook's kitchen with a *La Cornue* range imported from France, a custom ventilation hood made to accommodate the range, granite countertops, and a bedroom-sized pantry stocked with baking and kitchen equipment sufficient to cater large parties.

Antique copper pots, mostly from France, rare and unusual kitchen scales, and a collection of American mortars from the 1700's are displayed in Ring's kitchen, as is at least one item of memorabilia that will be familiar to Orinda history buffs

– the rooster statue from the old Phair's department store. Another bit of trivia for history buffs: two former U.S. Presidents were guests of the homes previous owner Clarence Woodward.

Family, friends, and entertaining are important to Cindy and Brad Barber and their newly renovated kitchen provides the perfect backdrop for memorable gatherings. The traditional remodel incorporates several Craftsman design elements. And, while the new kitchen stays within the original footprint, the remodel created a more open floor plan that allows for better circulation within the kitchen as well as improved flow to the dining room. A kitchen island topped with Costa Esmeralda granite is the focus of activity, whether that be rolling out biscotti dough (Cindy is an avid cook and baker), doing homework, or sitting for a light snack.

Cindy's fondness for cooking and entertaining has led her to explore the cuisines of France, Italy and India. "I love the creativity, the textures, the smells, and the hands-on aspects of cooking," Cindy says. "We love to entertain and cook with family and friends."

"Each of the kitchens on the tour reflects the owners' interests in food, culture, and entertaining," says Jorgens. "From the European elegance and charm of Gayle and Alex Lintner's home, to the artistic and architectural attention to detail of Laura Sawczuck and Luke Ellis's home where wooden doors salvaged from Paraguay complement 100-year old beams from an



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Rhydonia Ring and Gary Curtis' kitchen features a La Cornue range imported from France.

Iowa farmhouse. Coincidentally, both of these homes feature antique, Mediterranean stone fireplaces that were sourced by Venetian Stoneworks in Newport Beach."

The featured kitchens are hubs of [SEE TOUR page 14]

Making the Perfect Coffee Drink

By SALLY HOGARTY
Editor

"It's all about the balance between the coffee and the milk," says Café Teatro owner Joe Cho. Cho and his wife Jin have owned the independent coffee shop in the Orinda Library Plaza for almost seven years. They were recently chosen by Italian coffeemaker Illy as one of 28 "Artisti del Gusto" coffee shops in the United States.

Café Teatro was chosen based on its exclusive use of Illy coffee products and its commitment to excellence. The *artista* designation brought with it Illy's exclusive coffee machine, *La Cimbali*, designed by Luca Trazzi and special training for Cho and his staff of barristas. "The new machine makes great espresso because there is more pressure and better foam," Cho explains. "It also features auto cleaning, which helps maintain its high standards."

Part of the training involved learning how to create the perfect balance between the amount of coffee and the amount of [SEE CAFE page 16]



SALLY HOGARTY

Joe Cho, owner of Cafe Teatro, demonstrates how to use his new coffee machine, *La Cimbali*. Also preparing a drink is Laura Blanco.

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Emily Gorin

I knew I'd reached a critical point when my scale registered a weight I hadn't seen since I was pregnant. My excuse had been a new job – lots of stress and long hours. Instead of calming down after work through exercise, I was coming home late, and de-stressing with a drink and food. Living Lean helped me take control, and get back on-track fast. I started seeing results after one week. The personal attention and accountability made the difference for me in sticking with the program. I felt so supported and encouraged by my trainers and Sheena. The measureable results motivated me to work hard and actually look forward to being weighed and measured each week. I lost weight, and cut my percentage of body fat almost in half – in 11 weeks I went from over 30% body fat to 16% body fat. Before Living Lean, I would stand in front my full closet with nothing to wear because my clothes were too tight, or didn't fit at all. Now I can look in my closet and pick out any outfit I want – even my "skinny" clothes! I feel healthier, stronger, and happier. Other benefits I experienced include better posture, better sleep, and more energy. I can sincerely recommend Living Lean to anyone ready to take charge of their body.

— Emily Gorin

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WAY TO GROW

Way to Grow in Orinda
Spring Flowering Heirloom Shrubs Add Some Mid-level Eye Candy to your Garden



Steve & Cathy Lambert

February is a great time of year to begin exploring spring-flowering shrubs that can broaden the appeal of your garden. Regardless of your property size, shrubs fill a valuable niche between ground layer plants and flowers and your tree canopy. They can provide a pleasant backdrop for herbaceous perennials, help define your property borders and create screens for hiding fences or undesirable views. These mid-level plants can add a focal point to your garden, and enhance the character of foundation plantings around your home.

In Northern California, we are privileged to have a mild climate that allows flowering shrubs to bloom over a long period of time. Since this category of plants is so large, we'll narrow it down to a list of our favorites. To make our list, the shrub must: perform well in our Orinda microclimate, be low maintenance, be somewhat drought tolerant, deer resistant, and have the proper chill requirements.

The earliest bloomer is the Winter Daphne of which there are 150 varieties. Most daphnes have an incredible fragrance and bloom for four to five weeks. The most popular daphne, *Odorata*, is an evergreen which grows in a rounded form and has a solid green leaf. *Odorata* "Marginata" has a beautifully variegated leaf with yellow margins and rosy-pink flower buds that open to white. Reaching four-feet in both height and width, it's beautiful against a wall or near a patio or deck where its fragrance can be appreciated.

Another heirloom shrub often seen in

Orinda is *Chaenomeles*, or the Flowering Quince. Very drought tolerant and somewhat deer resistant, the quince is an old fashion shrub with a dark reddish-orange bloom that can survive with years of neglect. The leaves on this shrub are a dark, bronze-green and sometimes produce a yellow-green fruit which can be used for jelly. Besides the red-orange flowering varieties, such as "Cardinalis," there are also quinces with blooms of white, deep pink, coral and salmon. One notable variety *Toyonishiki*, has varying shades of red, pink and white, all on one plant. All types of quince prefer full sun and are not fussy about soil. Tall varieties of flowering quince can be trained like a wisteria or grapevine to cover a wall or trellis, while lower-growing quinces work well as a border style shrub. Quince stems can easily be forced for great cut flower displays, which have the lore of bringing good fortune during Chinese New Year.

Up until about 10 years ago, the *Loropetalum* (Chinese fringe flower) was known by very few people aside from horticulturists. In the last few years, however, this plant has grown from obscurity to common place among landscape plants. *Loropetalum* comes in several varieties; some with green foliage and white flowers such as *Snow Dance* to the dark purple foliage and bright pink flowers of *Fire Dance* and *Pipas Red*. There are also varieties such as *Razzelberry* and *Blush* that have both green and purple foliage with pink flowers. This plant is an evergreen that is deer resistant



Loropetalum is a colorful spring flowering shrub that nicely sets off the Iris plants in front for a colorful spring garden. STEVE LAMBERT

and fairly easy to grow.

Current varieties of the Chinese fringe flower range in mature heights from four to 15 feet tall and wide. Often times, these are chosen by homeowners and even some designers for their beautiful flowers without consideration to their growth potential. If a large growth variety *Loropetalum* is planted where there is space for a three-to four foot shrub, it takes constant pruning to keep it that size. We see way too many of these beautiful plants butchered into unnatural shapes such as boxes, meatballs, or lollipops. Flowering of the *Loropetalum* is heaviest in the spring but some intermittent blooms can occur anytime of the year.

Lilacs, a common spring flowering plant on the east coast, have traditionally needed colder winters than ours to produce a bounty of blooms. Because of their popularity as an heirloom garden shrub, plant breeders in Southern California have been creating varieties of lilacs that will perform well in our climate. Many of these fall into a group known as the *Descanso* hybrids. Although lilacs bring to mind a grape-bunch shaped bloom of light purple (the color itself was named after early lilacs) these new lilacs come in a range of colors from white to dark purple.

Spiraea prunifolia, usually called *Spiraea* or *False Bridal Wreath*, produces white lacy flowers often used in old-fashioned wedding bouquets. Grown in zones 4-9, this small Eastern Asian shrub, blooms in mid-spring and if taken care of properly, will bloom sporadically throughout the year. Its tiny (1/2 inch) double rows of white petals borne on graceful, upright branches stay on the bush for about four weeks in the spring. In autumn, the slender leaves turn a lustrous orange and add great fall color to your yard. This shrub thrives in full sun or light shade, requires soil with good drainage, and is moderately drought tolerant. There are several other varieties of

Spiraea that do well in our area and bloom all summer.

Another old fashioned flowering shrub that's getting the attention of plant breeders and gardeners alike is *Weigelia*. This graceful heirloom shrub with arching branches and lovely, bell-shaped blooms will attract both hummingbirds and butterflies to your garden. Grown in landscapes since the 1800's this deciduous shrub comes in many sizes, forms and colors. The largest *Weigelia* can be trained as a flowering tree. It has tri-colored blooms exploding like fireworks in white, pink and fuchsia. Another favorite is *Wine and Roses*, which has purple foliage with dark pink blooms. *Rubidor* has bright chartreuse foliage and red flowers which is great for livening up a lightly shaded area in your garden.

Deutzias, a large arching shrub, have long been looked upon as an undesirable landscape plant because they can take up too much space. They're now making a comeback with new, varieties which make it much easier to find a place for them in your garden. One of our favorite large *deutzias* is *Magician*. It has a very unique flower bud which is dark pink with a white star, these open up to white flowers with pink brush strokes on each petal. Dwarf varieties include *Nikko*, with pure white pompom flowers covering medium green leaves, and the newest one *Chardonnay Pearls*, which has yellow green foliage adorned with white bell like flowers.

All of the flowering heirloom shrubs mentioned above are relatively easy to maintain and bloom on last season's growth (wood) so the very best time to prune them is after they're done blooming. Unfortunately, many gardeners prune these in the fall cutting off a large portion of their potential new blooms.

If you have specific questions about this topic or suggestions for future articles, email office@gardenlightslandscape.com.



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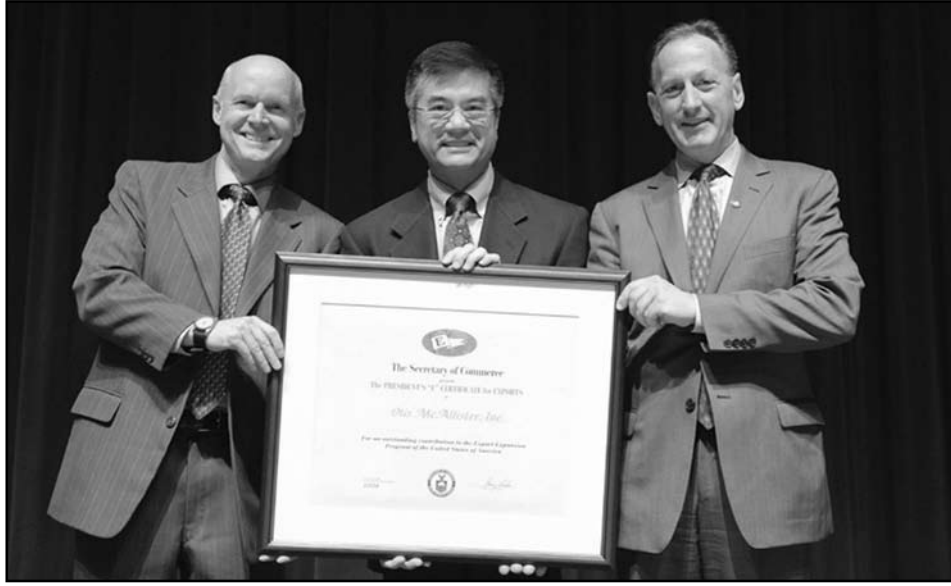
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AWARD WINNER / COMPUTERS

Local Resident Accepts Presidential Award for Export Company



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Orinda resident Royce Nicolaisen (L) and Everett Golden (R) of Otis McAllister received a Presidential Award from Secretary of Congress Gary Locke (C).

By PATRICIA SHEA
Contributing Writer

Royce Nicolaisen, a 20-year Orinda resident and CEO of San Francisco-based Otis McAllister, recently returned from Washington, D.C. where he, along with COO Everett Golden, received the President's E Award for Exports. Conferred by U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, the E Award is the highest government recognition for export activity. Otis McAllister received the prestigious award for its work expanding U.S. exports for dozens of brands. The company grew 22 percent between 2005 and 2008.

"Our humanitarian work is integral to both our philosophy and our success," said Royce Nicolaisen.

"Otis McAllister has demonstrated sustained commitment to export expansion. Its increase in export sales is impressive," commented Secretary Lock, adding, "Otis McAllister's achievements undoubtedly

have contributed to national export expansion efforts that support the U.S. economy and create jobs."

Otis McAllister was established in 1892 in San Francisco and today operates on six continents and over 100 countries from their San Francisco headquarters.

The company is also known for its humanitarian work. In 2009, this included sponsoring orphanages in India, supporting "Saving Girls" programs and sustainability programs, and leading corporate social responsibility programs overseas and in the U.S.

"Our humanitarian work is integral to both our philosophy and our success," said Nicolaisen. There is great emotional satisfaction in supporting the communities in which we do business, and we know from experience that when we contribute to their success, they contribute to ours."

The Presidential "E" Award was created by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, to recognize persons, firms, or organizations that contribute significantly to increasing United States exports.

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Whoooooo Are You?

By Evan Corstorphine
Portable CIO

Do you take a lot of digital photos? Maybe you're like me, and take tons of pictures, and then leave them for weeks (months, years..) to sort later. If so, there are some programs and websites you might be interested in trying.

The first program, is Picasa (<http://picasa.google.com>). It's offered free from Google and is easy to download and use. It's available for either the Macintosh or PC. The software finds and catalogs all pictures and videos stored on your computer. Once your media is catalogued, you can easily sort it and begin to organize and clean it up. Picasa has expanded the tools available and, in the new release, has improved editing features and visual effects to apply to your photos.

Another feature they've added is facial recognition. Facial recognition is a technology that according to Wikipedia.org, "... is a computer application for automatically identifying or verifying a person from a digital image or a video frame from a video source. One of the ways to do this is by comparing selected facial features from the image and a facial database." In Picasa, it lets you identify representative pictures of different people, creating your own little database. As you scan or add new photographs, the software will automatically analyze the photos and search them to see if it can identify anyone in your photos that match your database. This way, you can automatically "tag," or label, your pictures, making them easier to find, sort and use.

Facial recognition is a relatively new technology for personal use. It was originally designed to identify persons of interest for law enforcement in high volume settings. For instance, U.S. law enforcement has a database with pictures of known terrorists, and they have cameras at some major airports that analyze the facial features of every person walking through the

terminal. Those images are compared to the terrorist picture database, and when they get a hit, they spring into action.

The iPhoto program is also available on the Macintosh platform. It has a similar feature called "Faces," and it's just as easy to use as the Picasa program, if not easier. (www.apple.com/ilife/iphoto/).

If you have a picture of yourself you'd like to play around with, there are a couple websites you might find fun. The first www.cocacola.com is sponsored by Coca Cola. Here, you upload a picture of yourself that can be compared against the database of others who have submitted photos. The examples they provide show some uncanny resemblances between individuals. Their schtick is to try to connect people who look alike with each other. So, after you've done your comparison, you're given the opportunity to reach out to the individual you've been compared to through Facebook. I'm not certain that's something I'm interested in doing, but I thought their technology was interesting. When I tried it, I had a lousy picture of myself so I only got a 55 percent match with a guy named Ryan Johnson. I must say, we did have a lot of features in common!

The next website to try is <http://celebrity.myheritage.com/FP/Company/tryfacerecognition.php>. Here, you can upload a picture of yourself, and it will compare you to the celebrities they've loaded into their database. Using the same lousy photo, I uploaded to the Coke website, the celebrity facial recognition system determined I have a 70 percent facial match to none other than Sharon Stone. Don't laugh! Obviously, the systems aren't perfect, but it's fun to do and maybe you or your kids have an inner star waiting to be discovered!

If you need help setting your system up for the best digital results, give the friendly staff at Portable CIO a call at 925-552-7953, or drop us an email at info@theportablecio.com.

White Elephant Sale Coming in March

Time to prepare to attend Northern California's largest and best rummage sale which benefits the Oakland Museum of California. Shop till you drop on March 6 and March 7 from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. A preview sale takes place on January 31 from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

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Between the Lines Only Connect

Marian Nielsen, Orinda Books



Valentine's Day is in the offing, and in February we do try to connect and reconnect with our loves and with our friends. E.M. Forster made the phrase "only connect" famous in his novel, *Howard's End*, when Margaret begs for a connection between the prose and the passion that is in all of us and that will bring love to its height. Readers know that their favorite authors have a way of making them connect with the realities of life with an intensity that the daily news often lacks. Sometimes the books we read bring us a heightened awareness of passion — either at its best or at its most destructive.

To connect with love at its fictional best,

pick up *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*, a new novel by Helen Simonson that is an unabashed love story. Major Pettigrew, a retired and widowed military man, and Mrs. Ali, a Pakistani shopkeeper, both live in Edgcombe St. Mary, a small village in Sussex. He buys his tea at her village shop; she offers him a ride to a nearby town; will this unlikely friendship blossom into something stronger and what will friends and families make of this unusual pairing? Many recent novels that have dealt with culture clash have been grittier, but few have been as quietly comic and gently charming. Major Pettigrew and Mrs. Ali arrive a little too late for Valentine's Day

but connect with them in March.

On the other hand, fictional characters sometimes need to "disconnect." In William Boyd's riveting new thriller, *Ordinary Thunderstorms*, Jason Kindred is a climatologist and an unwitting witness to the murder of an eminent scientist. Kindred must lose his identity to save his life. His attempts to fabricate a new life on the margins of society will keep readers turning pages from beginning to end.

Nowadays on the Internet, random bloggers are always trying to make connections between rumor and reality. A perfect example is the ongoing discussion about the untimely death of Stieg Larsson, author of the Lisbeth Salander *Millennium* trilogy, *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played With Fire* (due in paperback in March), and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*. Conspiracy theorists continue to suggest that journalist Larsson's early involvement in exposing neo-Nazi groups in Sweden may have played a part in his sudden death though our Swedish

informants suggest that smoking 60 hand-rolled cigarettes a day could have had something to do with his heart attack. For the conclusion to Larsson's trilogy, which will again keep you nailed to your chair, readers in the U.S. have to wait until May but it's worth it!

This month we can also reconnect with a fictional friend, our favorite Scotsman — Jackson Brodie, Kate Atkinson's detective who makes a third appearance in her *When Will There Be Good News?*, now in paperback. A bloody, brutal murder in Devonshire is revisited thirty years and involves Jackson and Police Inspector Louise Monroe — their paths have crossed before — in a twisting turning story that makes your head spin as you try to keep up with Atkinson's dazzling plot ploys.

Some other readerly connections, this time between book and film, will be evident on February 2 when the Oscar nominations are announced. As always, many of the year's finest films are rooted in masterly

[SEE BOOKS page 16]

◆ TOUR from page 11

activity and reflections of the homeowners' sense of design and penchant for bringing people together around the table. The homes of Anne and Jeff Nash and Susan and Richard Berger, also featured on the tour, exemplify this beautifully. And, if the kitchen tour leaves you wanting for more, both Rhydonia Ring and Gayle Lintner have offered to teach cooking classes in their homes as another way to raise funds for the senior class. Ring will offer a "Taste Around the World" class for 12, which will draw upon the traditions of several international cuisines. And Lintner will offer a class in traditional German cooking featuring recipes she learned from her Bavarian mother-in-law during the 12 years that she

lived in Germany.

"The Orinda community is so supportive of our schools, and in designing this year's kitchen tour, we really wanted to create a fun event that would also give something back to those who support us," Jorgens says. In addition to the chance to see six remarkable kitchens, tour-goers will also have the chance to participate in a raffle and silent auction. "Local businesses have been very generous in providing donations to this event," Jorgens continues. "Village Pizza has offered a pizza party for 10, Entourage Salon and Day Spa has donated a couple's massage, and Elaine's Nails has donated a free manicure and pedicure. We also have donations from Morrison's Jewelers, the Orinda Theater, several Lamorinda Restaurants, and lunch with Orinda Mayor Tom McCormick followed by a tour of Orinda City Hall."

Tour-goers also are invited to have lunch at Shelby's Restaurant and pick up cupcakes at The Republic of Cake, which is across from Shelby's in Theatre Square. Both businesses have generously offered to donate a percentage of their sales that day to the Class of 2010 when customers show their kitchen tour booklet. Additionally, local artist Allison McCrady will donate a percentage of the proceeds from her artwork that will be sold at the event.

The Orinda Heart of the Home Kitchen Tour will be held on Tuesday, February 10 from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 each and available at McDonnell's Nursery, Orinda Books, and Elaine's Nails in Orinda, as well as Lazy K in Lafayette, and Across the Way in Moraga. Current Miramonte families may also purchase tickets on the Miramonte web store. For more information or to reserve tickets, call the event's co-chairs Gayle Lintner and Jill Wharton at 925-212-4208.



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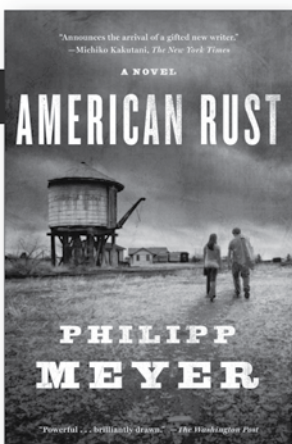
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SCHOOLS / STUDENTS

Holden School Celebrates 40 years of Innovative Education

By CAITLIN NEVIN
Contributing Writer

Carolyn Cogan founded Holden School, formerly Contra Costa Alternative School, in 1969. Cogan was a public school teacher at the time, alarmed by the number of students slipping through the cracks of the public school system where she taught. She was inspired by the then revolutionary thinking that alternative education was the best way to address the diverse needs of students.

Cogan began small, teaching 5-7 students in an Orinda pool house. Soon the budding school moved to the Orinda Community Church and expanded quickly to over 70 students. Today, the school has 40 students with 6-10 in each class.



SALLY HOGARTY

Holden High School is in the lower portion of the Orinda Community Church building.

Nestled in the same local church close to the Orinda Community Center, Holden is [SEE HOLDEN page 16]

Public Speaking Student Showcase on February 3



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Annie O'Dell, Scotty Huhn, and Drew Jackson are award-winning members of Miramonte's public speaking program.

By ALEXANDRA SLOVES
Contributing Writer

The Miramonte High School Public Speaking program, ranked in the top one percent of competitive speech programs nationwide, will put on their first annual student showcase on Wednesday, February 3 at 7:30 p.m. in the Miramonte Theater.

Miramonte offers the only competitive public speaking program in the Acalanes Union High School District with a 30 year tradition of excellence. The program is among the most popular electives at Miramonte, with five full classes. According to head coach Kristen Plant, public speaking imparts on students the knowledge and ability to eloquently voice their opinions, overcome shyness and stage fright, build their confidence, and become active and

aware members of society. Students invest hours preparing speeches before competing in district tournaments from September through April, culminating in the state tournament in April and the national tournament in June.

While public speaking is generally not a spectator sport, the February event will give the community a unique opportunity to view a wide array of award-winning speeches on topics from social networking to the energy crisis to the movie *The Parent Trap*. Light refreshments will be served after the performance. Tickets are \$5 and are available on the Miramonte Web Store (<http://miramonte.revtrak.net/tek9.asp>) or at the door.

For additional information, contact Kristen Plant, 925-280-3930 x. 3575 or email her at kplant@acalanes.k12.ca.us.



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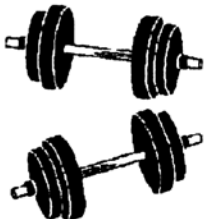
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◆ **SASSANO** from page 6

after school and summer safe haven for children in Hoboken's public housing – a neighborhood with a history of gang activity, violence, and drug-related arrests. Along with his teammates, Sassano is a frequent visitor at Hackensack Medical Center, bringing joy to the pediatric ward. He also participates annually in Dick's Sporting Goods "Shop with a Jock," a program where underprivileged children shop with a local athlete.

◆ **BOOKS** from page 14

fiction. Viggo Mortenson brings a touch of humanity to the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's dystopian novel, *The Road*. And director Jason Reitman gives a timely spin to *Up in the Air*, Walter Kirn's 2001 story of a frequent flyer because he takes on today's painful corporate down-sizing. *Coraline*, Neil Gaiman's 2002 chiller, and *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* by Roald Dahl both make reappearances in highly acclaimed stop-motion animation films that are touted as potential Oscar-winners. Maurice Sendak's classic *Where the Wild Things Are* is another juvenile title that has finally made its way to film, enhanced by a screenplay

from the Bay Area's own Dave Eggers, co-written and directed by Spike Jonze.

More **CONTINUATIONS** Nick Hornby, his *Juliet Naked* was an Orinda Books favorite in 2009, turned his hand to screen-writing when he adapted Lynn Barber's memoir, *An Education*, which became one of 2009's critically praised art house films. And Norah Ephron deserves at least three toques for her masterly adaption of not one but two memoirs, Julia Child's *My Years in France* and Julie Powell's *Julie and Julia*, to make one of the year's happiest films.

Young readers are looking forward to reconnecting with one of their favorite young heroes, Percy Jackson, in Febru-

ary, when Chris Columbus's film version of the first novel in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series, *The Lightning Thief*, appears on the big screen. And in 2009, young adult movie-goers had a chance to reconnect with their favorite fiction in the first two films made from Stephanie Meyer's hugely popular series, *Twilight* and *New Moon*. Stephanie Meyer credits Charlotte Bronte's Edward Fairfax Rochester and Jane Austen's Edward Ferrars as inspirations. Her connections with classic fiction stood her in good stead as she embarked on her road to bestsellerdom.

So a thought for February — connect with your friends and connect with fine fiction — both will enhance your life!



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◆ **CAFE** from page 11

steamed milk. "We now use slightly smaller cups designed by Illy to keep this balance," Cho says. "Illy believes that high quality coffee, excellent foam, and good customer service are the three essentials for a good coffee experience."

During their two days of training in

Oakland, Cho and his staff also learned to take a little more time when steaming the milk in order to get the best results. "People who love coffee don't mind waiting an extra minute to get the very best," he adds. "Illy really insists on high quality in everything, beginning with the beans." Illy purchases its coffee beans from Brazil where buyers choose only the best, ripened beans for

roasting in Italy. To be sure that Cho and the other signature Illy coffee shops maintain standards, Illy sends out tasters as customers to sample the coffee and evaluate the customer service. "That should keep us on our toes," says Cho, whose customers already give him and his staff an A+ for service and taste.

◆ **TRAVEL** from page 7

Mary-Leigh Miller of Moraga says, "As an avid photographer, I enjoy sharing my pictures, but I am also enriched by the visual perspective of others. The social context is also very fun, particularly when hosts

come up with a geography game or a travel word contest."

All the members are excited to begin the second year of the AAUW International Travel Group. The real travel will take many members to exotic new destinations

and the armchair travel will take everyone to Antarctica, Scotland, Galapagos, Australia, New Zealand, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Egypt, the Silk Route, Spain, Turkey and the gardens of Great Britain. Happy Travels!

◆ **HOLDEN** from page 15

a short walk from Orinda BART. The mission remains the same – helping students who are slipping through the cracks of the public school system to become reengaged and an active participant in the process of learning. Holden meets this aim by offering a broad range of educational opportunities, intended to help students enjoy their studies, thrive and become life long learners.

Similar to other high schools, students are required to complete 240 credits in order to graduate. Each semester students have the opportunity to suggest the books they would like to read and to evaluate the courses they have taken. A great variety of courses engage students and support their creativity. Each student's ability is valued and supported, with many students receiving elective credit for teaching a class to their fellow students.

"Holden's philosophy is one that helps reignite each student's passion through learning," explains Kristin Lamoureux, director of admissions. This is accomplished with a low student-teacher ratio,

with one staff member for every two students, enabling teachers to really know their students.

The staff members are a diverse mix of teachers, learning specialists, artists, counselors and musicians committed to creating a positive alternative education for a broad range of students with differing needs. Lamoureux explains that students struggling to adjust to or excel within a traditional academic setting "have an opportunity to become all that they can be" at Holden.

This year, Holden will celebrate 40 years of innovative, alternative education with a number of exciting events. In December, an arts festival boasting student's work was held at a local alumni's salon. On March 19, Holden will have its annual fundraiser open to the public with four bands performing, one to represent each respective decade since its establishment.

For more information about Holden School, contact Kristin Lamoureux at 254-0199 or visit the school's website at www.holdenhigh.org.



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CALENDAR

ON THE CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

- 3 **Parent Education Night**, a panel of youth experts from CRC Health Group will discuss helping youth manage stress and issues that can result in unhealthy behavior, 66 St. Stephen's Drive, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., free, 254-3770 or visit www.ststephensorinda.org.
- Miramonte High School Public Speaking Team** will present an evening of award-winning speeches on a variety of topics, 7:30 p.m., Miramonte Theatre. Call 925-280-3930.
- 4 **Friends of the Library**, First Thursday Book Sale, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., book shop and sorting room, 254-2184.
- 5 **First Friday Forum** guest speaker Kitty Calavita, Chancellor's Professor, UC Irvine, will talk on Thinking Outside the Box on Immigration Policy, Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, 49 Knox Drive, Lafayette. 1 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall, 283-8722 or lopc.org.
- 10 **Miramonte Parent's Club**, "Heart of the Home" Kitchen Tour, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., tour, delicious foods, raffle items, and more to fund Miramonte Grad Night celebration. Tickets at McDonnell Nursery, Orinda Books, and www.miramonte.acalanes.k12.ca.us.
- Mayors Luncheon**, noon, Orinda Community Center. Sponsored by Orinda Rotary and Orinda Chamber of Commerce. State of the City address by Mayor Tom McCormick. \$11. Call 254-3909.
- 11 **Orinda Books** presents Orinda native Dr. Christine Carter who will talk and sign copies of her book, *Raising Happiness, Simple Steps for a More Joyful Family*, 276 Village Square, 4 p.m., 254-7606.
- 13 **California Independent Film Festival**, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, 4 and 7 p.m., special guest star Mary Badham who played Scout, Orinda Theater. Tickets at theater or www.caiff.org.

AT THE LIBRARY

All events are free unless otherwise specified. Note: The library is closed Feb. 12 to 14.

- 2 **Toddler Lapsit**, stories, songs and finger plays for 1- to 3-year-olds and their caregivers, Gallery Room, 10 to 10:30 a.m. No registration required but attendance limited to once per week. Also Feb. 3, 9, 16, 17, 23 and 24.
- Peek-A-Boo Time**, stories, songs, rhymes and rhythms for newborns to 1-year-olds (pre-walkers) and their caregivers, Gallery Room, 11:30 a.m. Also Feb. 9, 16 and 23.
- George Hammond of Humanities West** will preview *Alexander/Alexandria: The Flowering of Hellenistic Culture* at a fireside chat, 7 to 8 p.m., for teens and adults.
- 3 **Homework Help**, volunteers help elementary and middle-schoolers with math and science homework, 3:30 to 6 p.m., sign up for a 30-minute session at the Information Desk. Also Feb. 10, 17 and 24.
- 6 **Saturday Morning Live!** Family story time for 3- to 5-year-olds, Picture Book area, 11 a.m. Also Feb. 20 and 27.
- Origami for Fun**, learn to fold animals and figures. All skill levels welcome, suitable for those 8 years and older, parents help children less than 7 years, Tutoring Room, 2:30 to 4 p.m.
- 10 **Drawing Class for Young Children**, Geanie Choy leads a creative drawing class for K through 2nd-graders, Tutoring Room. Sign-ups start at 3 p.m., class at 4 p.m.
- 16 **Tell It: Tales for Preschoolers**, a storyteller weaves folktales and legends adapted for 3- to 5-year-olds, Tutoring Room, 1 p.m.

For more information on library programs, call 254-2184.

CLUB MEETINGS

- Diablo Star Chapter #214**, Order of the Eastern Star. Second Monday, 7:30 p.m., Orinda Masonic Center. Contact Karen Seaborn, 925-689-0995.
- Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe**, third Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Orinda Community Church, 10 Irwin Way, Orinda www.moragaadobe.org
- Friends of the Orinda Creeks**, fourth Wednesday, 8:30 a.m., May Room, Orinda Library. Call 253-1997.
- Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary**, Postino in Lafayette, 7 a.m. every Friday, 254-0440, ext.463.
- Montelindo Garden Club** meets the third Friday of the month, September through May, 9 a.m., at Orinda Community Church, 10 Irwin Way. Guest speaker on Feb. 19 is Denise Della Santina, nursery manager from Save the Bay. Visit www.montelindogarden.com or email montelindogarden@aol.com.
- Moraga Valley Kiwanis Club**, every Thursday, 7:15 to 8:30 a.m. at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church, 10 Moraga Valley Lane, Moraga. Call 376-4850.
- Orinda Rotary**, Community Center, every Wednesday at noon, 254-2222.
- Orinda Association**, Orinda Library, May Room, second Monday, 7:15 p.m., 254-0800.
- Orinda Hiking Club** meets at 9 a.m. at the old library parking lot on Irwin Way for its weekly Wednesday Hike. Call Steve at 253-0131 or visit www.orindahiking.org.
- Orinda Historical Society**, third Wednesday of the month, OHS Museum, 3 to 5 p.m., 254-1353.
- Orinda Job's Daughters**, first and third Monday, 7 p.m., 9 Altarinda Road, 925-283-7176.
- Orinda Juniors** community service group meets first Tuesday of the month, September to June, 7 p.m. Contact Diane Petek and Ann Sullivan at orinda.juniors@yahoo.com for location.
- Orinda/Tábor** (Czech Republic) Sister City Foundation, Fourth Thursday of the month, 7 p.m. social, 7:30 p.m. meeting, call 254-8260 for location.
- Orinda Teen Advisory Council** meets second Wednesday of the month, 4 p.m., Orinda Community Center, 28 Orinda Way. For information, email orindateenadvisorycouncil@gmail.com.
- Orinda Woman's Club**, Second Tuesday, 9:30 a.m. to noon; talent show follows Feb. 9 meeting. call Jean Barnhart, 254-3881.
- 2nd Wednesday Book Group** will discuss *1776* by David McCullough, 3 p.m. Orinda Books 276 Village Square, 254-7606.
- The World Affairs Book Group** meets the 3rd Tuesday at Orinda Books, 276 Village Square, 254-7606, 3 p.m. New members welcomes, 254-7606.

Send calendar items to Maggie Sharpe at m.sharpe66@gmail.com

High School Visual Arts Competition

The Orinda Arts Council is now accepting artwork from high school students who live or attend school in Orinda, Lafayette or Moraga through midnight, February 18. Register online at www.orindaartscouncil.org. Competition features 2D, 3D and photographic art. Artwork will be exhibited at Orinda Library Gallery March 5 - 30.

First Friday Speaker Thinks Outside the Box

By BOBBIE DODSON
Staff Writer

First Friday Forum speaker, Kitty Calavita, has chosen for her topic, "Thinking Outside the Box on Immigration Policy" to be presented in the sanctuary at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, 49 Knox Drive, on February 5, 2010. The talk begins at 1:30 p.m. with refreshments in the Fellowship Hall at 1 p.m.

Calavita serves as Chancellor's Professor, University of California, Irvine in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society. The Chancellor's Professorship is awarded to UC faculty for distinction in research. Calavita has conducted research and published widely in the field of immigration and immigration lawmaking. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Delaware.

"It has been almost 25 years since comprehensive immigration reform was passed in the United States," Calavita says. "During this time, tens of millions of immigrants have entered, some authorized and others unauthorized, some temporary and others remaining to become permanent members of our society. There are now an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living and working in the U.S. What to do about undocumented immigration is a matter of great controversy. In this presen-



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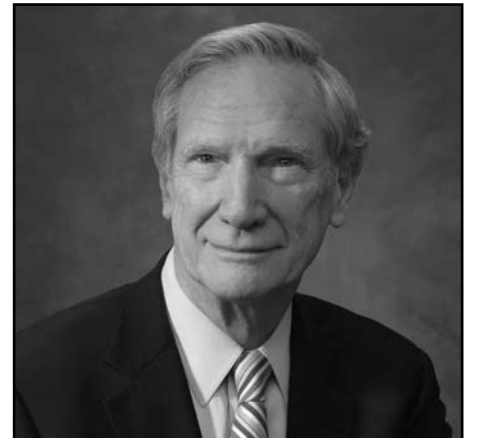
Kitty Calavita.

tation, we will see that most of the reforms now being discussed have been tried in the past, most have failed, and some have had disastrous, unintended consequences. I will argue that if we want to construct a truly workable solution, we need to think 'outside of the box' of conventional immigration policies."

Plan to attend on February 5 and bring friends to hear this timely and provocative presentation.

Ambassador Warren Clark to Speak

Ambassador Warren Clark, a career diplomat who served in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Canada, and at the United Nations before he became Executive Director of Churches for Middle East Peace, will speak at the Orinda Community Church on March 5 at 7 p.m. His organization is a consortium of sponsoring Christian Churches including mainline protestant denominations, Orthodox and Roman Catholic. The organization strives for peace with justice in the region by tackling such issues as Palestinian refugees and persecution of Christian minorities. For more information, call 254-4906.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Ambassador Warren Clark.

MEETINGS:

CITY/FIRE/SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING SCHEDULE

- Acalanes Union High School District**, first and third Wednesdays, district office, 1212 Pleasant Hill Road, Lafayette, 7:30 p.m.
- City Council**, first and third Tuesdays, 7 p.m., Library Auditorium, www.cityoforinda.org.
- City of Orinda Police Services** workshop, Feb. 3, 6 p.m., Sarge Littlehale Room, 253-4221.
- Historic Landmarks Committee**, fourth Tuesday, 3 to 5 p.m., Library Garden Room, public is welcome, for information, call 925-788-7323.
- Moraga-Orinda Fire District**, third Wednesday, 7 p.m., Administration Building, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga.
- Orinda Union School District Board of Trustees**, OUSD Conference Room, 8 Altarinda Road, 4 p.m.
- Planning Commission**, second and fourth Tuesdays, 7 p.m., Library Auditorium, 253-4210.

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BUSINESS BUZZ

◆ BUZZ from page 20

residential service from foundations and structural repairs, to trim and finish and tile work. "I am always on the job site and in constant communication with homeowners," he says.

In addition to managing the accounting, Ramona Maramonte recently co-produced an independent film with fellow Orindan Julie Rubio. *Six Sex Scenes and a Murder* was directed and written by Rubio, while Ramona worked behind the camera and scouted locations. Her efforts resulted in many scenes being filmed here in Orinda. The murder mystery film premiered at the Lumiere Theatre in San Francisco last fall and is available from Netflix and Amazon.com.

Anthony and Ramona met in high school, but did not begin dating until after graduation. The couple celebrates their 20th wedding anniversary this year. They have three children, all of whom have attended Orinda schools. Robert is a 2007 Miramonte High School graduate, and daughters Tyler and Tonii are currently enrolled there. This self-described artsy family enjoys musical and artistic activities together. Anthony enjoys playing the drums in his spare time and Robert plays the guitar. You might spot Anthony taking his golden retriever siblings Samson and Sonny, as well as Pomeranian and terrier mix BJ, to Rancho Laguna in Moraga.

"We love what we do, and love working with people. Tony is very detailed. He comes from the old school and his skills are very in-depth and definitely on the cutting edge of technology," says Ramona. For more information about Mara Construction, and to view recent projects, visit the website at www.maraconstruction.com. You can reach Anthony Maramonte at 510-385-5291.

Heartsent Adoptions, Inc. – Domestic and International Adoptions with Heart

In 1995, Val Free established Heartsent Adoptions, Inc. Her motivation was a belief that the system for connecting couples with their hearts' desire – a child to adopt – should be supportive, educational and kind. Free and her husband, Richard Lotspeich, had already adopted three children and were extremely knowledgeable about the process involved. Their experience with the politics and regulations of the agencies involved in the process helped prepare them well for the establishment of Heartsent Adoptions, Inc. "I wanted to keep adopting, and my husband suggested we help other people in a big way," said a smiling Free, who went on to adopt two more children.

"We deal with a lot of governments and a variety of cultures. We investigate the politics of adoption and meet with a government's adoption central authority. We have worked in China since 1995, and seen

hundreds of orphanages. Some were very bad, and over time some have improved. It was not until 1991 that legal adoptions were available in China," says Free.

Three years ago, Free opened the doors to Heartsent Learning Solutions, an academic development program that is neurologically based. "We began to see so many children, including our own, having difficulties in school. We tried private schools and tutors,



Val Free runs Heartsent Adoptions.

and nothing worked, so we thoroughly researched the subject. We discovered there is an extremely important and practical reason mobiles are placed above cribs that is directly related to training the infant's eye muscles early on. This eye muscle strength is crucial for learning how to read and academic progress," explains Free. "The orphanages we visit in various parts of the world, including China, Guatemala, Vietnam, Thailand, Russia and Colombia, do not have mobiles. Often the children do not have cribs, but lie on mattresses placed on the floor. The ceilings are blocks of concrete with no unusual features, just a blank, smooth chock of concrete. We realized the correlation between lack of visual stimuli early in life and academic difficulties in school."

Relatively recent brain research reveals that the brain is pliable and can be re-trained. Along with Christine Gomes, a classroom teacher with 25 years of experience who has received neurological training, Free has created a curriculum at Heartsent Learning Solutions to address these issues. Attending Heartsent Learning Solutions is part of the post-placement program. The youngest child is three and the oldest is 17, with the most common age group being the five to 11-year-old set. Children attending school four days a week develop results within six weeks. "Kids who are not progressing academically begin to act out, because they are not learning and self-esteem issues develop from that," explains Free. "We find that our program is very effective."

Free has placed about 1,000 children with families over the past 15 years. She brings compassion and love to her work every day. "I am very passionate about this work. It is crucial that children get the support they need to succeed in their new life with their

new family."

Since 1976, Free has been a sponsor of the Village of Hope School in Vietnam, where she met Duc, whom she and Lotspeich ultimately adopted. They continued to adopt four more children, Tanawan, Li, Tian and Chun Che, from other countries, including China and Thailand.

Free and Lotspeich have been Orinda residents for 20 years. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening, painting, and in her words, "a lot of color in my life." Most of all, Free likes being a mother. "This is a great job for traveling. I really enjoy traveling abroad with a group to adopt their children," she says with a smile. A poem on Free's wall says everything about her chosen field:

Not of my flesh
Nor bone of my bone
but yet miraculously,
my own.
Don't forget
not for one minute
You weren't born under my heart
but in it.

Heartsent Adoptions, Inc. is located in Orinda at 140 Brookwood Road, Suite 100. For more information, visit the website at www.heartsent.org or give Val Free a call at 254-8883, or email her at heartsent@earthlink.net.

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Kattenburg Architects Receives Orinda Mayor's Award for Excellence in Architecture

Rick Kattenburg has completed 100 remodeling projects in the Lamorinda area and his career high so far tops 500, but nothing has been quite as sweet as receiving the 2009 Orinda Mayor's Award for Excellence in Architecture, in the Major Projects category. Kattenburg is the son of an American diplomat, and spent a large part of his childhood in Germany. With his background and 33 years of experience, he is able to bring a high level of sophistication while incorporating modern elements to ev-

ery project, leading to outstanding results.

With an emphasis on residential design, Kattenburg Architects also takes on commercial work. A recently completed project was the tenant improvement in Theatre Square for Republic of Cake, and the firm is currently providing a similar service for Loard's Ice Cream in the Moraga Shopping Center. "We are mostly green because we specialize in residential remodeling, and I go out of my way to take the old and make it new. Materials are updated in this process where we take 1950's tract style homes and make them special," explained Kattenburg, as we sat in his sunny Orinda office overlooking landmark Theatre Square at 11 Moraga Way.

Kattenburg is a member of the Orinda

Environmental Sustainability Working Group, and with 35 years of experience creating sustainable architecture – with much work involving renovation – Kattenburg points out that his firm is the epitome of "recycling" experts. They add longer life to older structures while reducing carbon footprints. Green is just one of many elements that Kattenburg Architects incorporate into



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Rick Kattenburg has won numerous awards for his architectural designs.

residential designs.

In addition to the 2009 Orinda Mayor's Award for Excellence in Architecture, the Town of Moraga recognized the firm with the Best Major Remodel Design Award in 2004. Sue Severson, Orinda Councilmember and former mayor, says, "Kattenburg Architects does an outstanding job in many projects in and around Orinda. This particular project, 51 Los Altos Road, is a well-deserved architectural award. We appreciate Rick's longtime and ongoing contributions to the community, both as a volunteer and with his architectural designs." Kattenburg has been a strong business leader in Orinda. He has served on the board of directors of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce for the past 13 years and is currently the board's vice-president.

Kattenburg is married to Candy, who has served as the executive director of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce for the past four years. The couple resides in the Lamorinda area. "The Chamber is hosting a wonderful benefit, "Live at the Orinda" on Friday, March 5. This champagne comedy gala at the Orinda Theatre promises to be an entertaining evening, and we are encouraging everyone to come out to support local businesses," says Kattenburg, who also serves as the moderator of the design unit at Miramonte High School's annual career night.

For more information about Kattenburg Architects, you can visit the website at www.kattenburgarchitects.com or email Rick at rkarch@pacbell.net. The office number is 253-7828.

Mara Construction Celebrates 20th Anniversary

Anthony Maramonte began his career as an apprentice carpenter in the union, turned out as a journeyman, and started his own construction company in February 1990, specializing in remodels and home additions. Although his job sites are located all over the Bay Area, most of his construction projects are within Lamorinda, Walnut Creek and Oakland. Maramonte works out of his Orinda home office, where his wife, Ramona, manages the accounting aspects of the family business.

"We pay attention to detail, budget and schedule. I put a lot of emphasis on listening to the homeowner's ideas and incorporating them. Great communication is crucial," says Maramonte, who has extensive experience working with local architects. Free estimates are provided and he is always happy to help with design concepts. "I like to take something that is messed up, fix it and make it look terrific. It is like a puzzle. We tear it down and put it back together. Most of all, I enjoy creating things that endure," he adds.

Mara Construction is a small company,



VALERIE HOTZ

Ramona and Anthony Maramonte founded Mara Construction 20 years ago.

offering prompt service with attention to detail. Projects range from small (\$2,000) to new construction (\$1 million plus). "By offering excellent customer service and good communication with clients, we have been so successful that business has come by referrals," says Maramonte. He likes using new technology and takes the time to do the job right, offering complete

[SEE BUZZ page 19]

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