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Lamorinda Community Comes Together to Celebrate the Holidays

By Sophie Braccini



Top left: Beverley Alwari, Holly Lucas-Alcalay, Susan Captain and Jackie Smith show off items that will be available at the Hacienda Holiday Faire in Moraga. Bottom left: Santa visits children during last year's holiday tree lighting in Orinda. Right: Christmas carolers sing during "It's a Wonderful Life" event in Lafayette.

Excitement is building around local towns and cities, the air filling with the scent of pine as tree farms pop up along decorated streets and next to nearby storefronts in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda. Whether you are looking for one-of-a-kind gifts for loved ones in a festive historic setting, seeking a visit from Santa, a sleigh ride, or the glitter of lights on trees or menorahs, Lamorinda will deliver this December.

☞ Santa will make his first official Lamorinda visit at the Moraga Tree Lighting ceremony at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 3 in the Moraga Commons Park. Entertainment begins at 6:30 p.m. and the tree will be lit at 7 p.m. Then on Dec. 4-6, for the first time Donald Rheem's historic mansion, the Hacienda de las Flores, will be decorated and open for the Hacienda Holiday Faire. The fair will give Lamorinda residents the opportunity to discover the beautiful home and grounds that Rheem developed into an estate during his residency in the 1930s for his wife, Alice Goodfellow Rheem.

☞ Organized by Hollie Lucas-Alcalay, local business owner and board member of the Hacienda Foundation, and Jackie Smith, organizer of the Tarabrook Holiday Boutique in Orinda, the fair will feature over 40 Lamorinda artisans selling their unique creations, such

as woodwork, ceramics, herb-based specialties, chocolates and toffees. "We didn't want to have more than two or three people offering the same type of craft," says Lucas-Alcalay, "and the ones we chose have very different styles. They bring original pieces, all different."

☞ Captain Vineyards of Moraga will host a complimentary wine reception to kick off the event from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4. The fair is a fundraiser for the Hacienda Foundation and will be open from noon to 8 p.m. on Friday and from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

☞ In Lafayette, Saint Nick will make another official visit in one of his favorite sleighs, the Old Betsy fire engine, at 4 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4 at the Lafayette Plaza Park as part of the city's annual "It's a Wonderful Life" event.

☞ "The 1919 Model T fire truck will be driven by George Wasson himself, who restored the Lafayette historical artifact," says grand master of ceremonies and Lafayette Chamber of Commerce executive director, Jay Lifson.

☞ The event will include a tree lighting at 5:30 p.m. and entertainment provided by Stanley Middle School, Lafayette Nursery School, the Bradley School of Music, The Contra Costa Children's Chorus, Lamorinda Theatre Academy and Town Hall Theatre Kids from 4 to 6 p.m. Complimentary hot chocolate and treats will be provided courtesy of Whole Foods of Lafayette and food trucks will offer dinner items for purchase.

☞ "It takes a whole business community to make this event happen," adds Lifson. Honey Bear Trees across from Acalanes High School donated the tree and Dana Green and Branagh Development are contributing two-thirds of the cost of the city's twinkle lights. "We've been able to extend them down to Brown Avenue and over on Pleasant Hill Road," says Lifson.

☞ A public menorah lighting is also scheduled at Lafayette Plaza Park on Sunday, Dec. 6, offered by the new Chabad of Lamorinda. At 4 p.m. activities for families and children will be organized in the Hanukkah tradition with food, crafts, music and dancing. The first candle on the 10-foot menorah will be lit at 5p.m.

☞ For more sparkle, you can head to Orinda where there will be a tree lighting ceremony and entertainment, including a visit from Santa on a fire engine, starting at 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5 in front of the Bank of America building in the Village Square Shopping Center, and at Theatre Square enjoy horse and carriage rides from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., a tree lighting ceremony at 7:30 p.m. and another official visit from Santa. (That big guy gets around.)

☞ "On the first Saturday we will have free coffee and hot chocolate," says Lisa Bellew of the Marcomm group that handles the event planning for Theatre Square. "A Lamorinda Theater Academy performance is scheduled at 7 p.m. and children are also invited to an ornament workshop, all here in the square." A second Saturday of festivities is planned at Theatre Square from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12, which will include the carriage rides, face painting and a photo booth.

☞ Many more Lamorinda holiday events are planned this season (see the Holiday Events listing on page B8) that provide a wonderful opportunity to enjoy Lamorinda at its best, with local entertainment, unique shopping and spiritual gatherings underscoring what makes this community great.

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