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Canyon Emergency Drill goes better than expected

By Chris Lavin



Canyon resident Tom Llewellyn, left, and Michael Roemer of Lamorinda CERT in a Moraga parking lot April 23 during Canyon's practice evacuation in case of fire. Photo Chris Lavin

the parking lot of St. Monica's Church in Moraga.

Llewellyn said he hadn't known how many would actually come out for the drill, but was happy with the turnout.

"I thought we did very well," he said, adding that many residents who did not attend had let him know they would be out of Canyon at that time, anyway.

"The more everyone prepares, the better," said Michael Roemer, of the Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), which has participated in similar drills in Orinda, Lafayette and Moraga. "Real fires have already happened in our community."

One of the worst local fires was the Merrill Fire in Moraga's Sanders Ranch neighborhood that ignited at 1 a.m. on Oct. 10, 2019. Nearby residents there were forced to leave their houses in the middle of the night, in complete darkness due to a PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoff, many with only the clothes on their backs.

"I heard from a lot of people, when I met them later, who told me they didn't expect to find their houses intact when they got back," Roemer said. "People have to be vigilant, and prepared."

And that is what the people of Canyon tried to do. Some had emergency bags packed and ready; others brought empty bags just for the practice. The weeks it took to get everyone ready was headed up by Llewellyn and Jamie Barret-Riley, with the help of Dennis Rein of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. They made sure to have updated phone trees on everyone's door well before the drill. The phone tree was utilized in tandem with a local emergency siren system and calls from the Community Warning System, initiated by the MOFD.

All Canyonites were made aware of the drill. Packing an emergency bag was recommended.

"I know I have to get packed," said Aundre Speciale as she accepted coffee from Red Cross volunteer Diana Graham. "You know, I lost everything when I was younger. Yeah, our house burned to the ground. I thought, 'Oh, no! I left my grandmother's ring!' I don't want to live through anything like that again."

One hyper-alert resident in the parking lot beamed. "I have 17 bags already packed," he said. "Even one that has a lot of first-edition books signed by the author."

It didn't hurt that both alert and still-groggy participants could munch on pastries while Red Cross volunteers handed out coffee and hot chocolate, provided gratis by Safeway and Starbucks.

"It was a good turnout," Roemer said, before he continued to talk about wind directions throughout Lamorinda changing every 24 hours. "We all need to take this seriously. We're all seeing the effects of climate change."

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