

## Lafayette Entrepreneur's Club

### An Alliance of Independent Business Professionals

By Sophie Braccini



Jay Lifson, Executive Director  
Lafayette Chamber of Commerce

**I**n the building of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, at 100 Circle Dr, on every third Thursday of the month, a group of local entrepreneurs meets at 8:30 AM. Prior to the July 19th meeting of the Lafayette Entrepreneur's Club, Jay Lifson, Master of Ceremony and Lafayette Chamber's Executive Director, warned: "This is summer, we might not have as much attendance as usual." But the room filled up quickly with men and women from all types of businesses. There was such a large turnout that late comers had to go in search of extra chairs.

The meeting started with

new comers introducing themselves and their businesses. Business cards began to circulate as people identified potential opportunities, common interests and synergies. The entrepreneurs present were diverse, among this crowd I met Bonny Weil, General Contractor, Luanne Stevenson, Pajaro Group, Chef Dan Leff, caterer, Gregory White of Nowville, AJ Nisen Bank of America Mortgage, Deborah Hoffman, Reliv International and Jacques Bernou, acupuncturist. After Jay Lifson spoke about upcoming events, Light Energy Systems gave a presentation on why solar investment makes sense today for businesses and home owners, sparking a lively discussion amongst the participants.

The group was started in 2002 as an effort to promote home-based businesses. At that time, about 20% of the 500 members of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce were home based businesses. For about a year, volunteers provided a good deal of the leadership and meetings were effective at keeping members

"in the loop." Then, it seemed as if some of the enthusiasm and focus of the meetings dissipated. Involvement by members seemed to drop off from where it had been. When Jay Lifson began his job at the Chamber in April of 2005, he saw the need to instill new life into the system and started a "Home Based Business Club." Soon thereafter, the club renamed itself the "Entrepreneurs Club" in order to avoid the negative connotations often associated with home-based business owners that run their business in their bathrobes. Michelle Billing and Keith Vaisnor are now the co-chairs of the Club, and have been the driving force to get the Club where it is today.

The group is funded by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. It is open to entrepreneurs who are not necessarily Chamber members. "After they've come to the Entrepreneur's meetings," notes Lifson, "about 50% end up becoming Chamber members." Being a member of the Club provides many benefits: participation in a business fair, learning to de-

velop an "Elevator Speech", relevant business tips and training, and being part of a caring business community.

The Club's best representatives are the members themselves. Karen Stein relates, "I've appreciated getting to know the folks in the E-Club because it is such a great way for those of us in service businesses who don't have the visible retail or restaurant storefronts on Mt. Diablo Blvd. to get connected to the larger Lafayette business community." Chef Dan Leff comments: "I find that the Lafayette Entrepreneur's Group is most useful because of its unique combination of being both friendly and serious. Attendees are there to learn and do business; networking occurs organically at these meetings. Some of the most productive times I've had have occurred AFTER the E-Club meeting when I'll sit down to discuss business on a one-on-one basis with another E-Club attendee."

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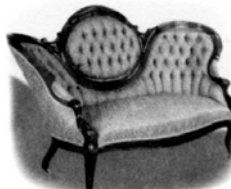
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