

LAMORINDA Business

business briefs

BrightStar Franchise Comes to Lafayette

BrightStar Healthcare, 3746 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Suite 204, Lafayette, 284-8888

Matt and Marilyn Shriner opened a new independently owned franchise of BrightStar Healthcare, a full-service healthcare staffing agency, "Families expect support from someone who can not only provide a higher and more knowledgeable level of care, but also answer questions and help lower anxiety," Marilyn Shriner said. "Our services allow clients to remain in the comfort of their own homes and offer peace of mind to family members who can be confident that their loved ones are receiving the care, attention, and most importantly the companionship they need and deserve."

Living Lean – Sheena Lakhota moves and enriches her services to the community

15 Altarinda Rd – Orinda, 360-7051

Lakhota is the owner of Leaving Lean, a weight management philosophy that integrates exercise and nutrition. She is developing a new nourishment offering in conjunction with local merchants, so grabbing a sandwich or a drink on the go can be part of your new healthy lifestyle. Lakhota is presently working with Gepetto, Rising Loafer, Diablo Foods, Café Theatro and Quencher. Soon you'll find "Living Lean" sandwiches, breads and/or drinks. Her new studio offers in addition to personalized training, semi-private dance, weight, spin or cardio classes.



left to right: Peter Eigenheer, Francoise Cervantes and Katharine Livingston having a spin in Lakhota's new studio
Photo Elizabeth Wolfe, Living Lean Client

East Bay Coldwell Banker offices collected more than 1,000 toys:

The Bay Area chapter collected nearly 5,000 toys for needy children in the Bay Area.

This marked the 20th consecutive year that Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage served as an official corporate partner for the United States Marine Corps Reserve's "Toys for Tots" campaign. Larry Klapow, president of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in the San Francisco Bay region, said, "If it weren't for our wonderful customers and fellow residents, none of this would be possible."

East Bay Mortgage Planner Earns Exclusive CMC Designation

Fountainhead Mortgage, Orinda, 925-317-7601

Mortgage Planner Ryan Lauper has earned the exclusive Certified Mortgage Consultant (CMC) designation, the highest level of certification available from the National Association of Mortgage Brokers. Fewer than 40 California mortgage planners have earned the title and less than 1 percent of all mortgage originators nationwide have attained the distinction.

New Workshop:

Women's Business Connection of Lamorinda wants you to "Search Engine Optimize"

The Lamorinda group invites all business owners to a workshop on how to make your website work for you: search optimization, transforming visitors into clients, paid search realities, etc. At the Orinda Library on Wednesday Feb 13th from 5:30 to 7:30pm, Cost is \$10 including food. More info 283-7546 or www.wbclamorinda.com

"We've Lived Though It Before – But Will we be Ready To Do It Again?"

In the event of a major emergency, more than 40% of businesses close and never re-open. The Chambers of Commerce of Moraga, Lafayette and the Town of Moraga are hosting an Emergency Preparedness Seminar, Wednesday, March 26th at the Holy Trinity Cultural Center, 1700 School Street in Moraga. Two sessions are offered to accommodate different business schedules: 7:30 to 10 am (Cost \$5 with breakfast) and 6:30 to 9pm (Cost \$10 with dinner). Deadline to register is March 20th, contact Ken Tom at 376-0533.

Lafayette Green Awards.

The city of Lafayette is currently collection nominations for the new Lafayette Green Awards, which will recognize outstanding efforts during 2007 that contributed to a more sustainable community. To learn more go to www.sustainablelafayette.net/greenawards/

News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, 100 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette, www.lafayettechamber.org

- Green Committee second meeting, Wednesday January 30th at noon at the Chamber office. Identify easy steps to take to be more sustainable. The committee was created in partnership with Sustainable Lafayette. Review success stories at www.sustainablelafayette.net/businesses/
- Chamber Mixer, Wednesday February the 13th, starting at 5:30 pm, Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School Street.
- The Chamber of Commerce organized volunteers on the 18th of December to distribute to the business community a "commuter guide" in form of a map indication long term parking in town. The guide can be found at the Chamber's office.
- Annual Business Person of the Year Dinner on Friday January 25th, 6:00pm at the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa. The Chamber is honoring Larry Blodgett as our 2008 Business Person of the Year. This dinner is the annual membership meeting. Included are the Mayor's "State of the City" address and the introduction of the Chamber's 2008 Board of Directors. Go to www.lafayettechamber.org and download a registration form.



L-R: Chamber President Larry Duson (Bank of The West), Membership Services Director Barbara Gilmore, Steve Palsa (Minuteman Press)
Photo Wendy Schek

Chamber of Commerce of Moraga, www.moragachamber.org

- Chamber General Meeting. On Friday Jan 25th from 8 AM to 9:30 AM Terezetto's restaurant in the Moraga Shopping Center. This is a time to connect as a business community, have a business or two showcased so we all know what businesses, small and large, are part of our Chamber, and have speakers speak on topics that will enhance our businesses as a whole and our business community in general.
- Shop Moraga First committee. The Shop Moraga First committee continues to encourage businesses to display the Shop Moraga First posters and have their staffs wear Shop Moraga First pins. The committee is also making a concerted effort to reach out to Saint Mary's College to bridge the gap between Moraga businesses and the Saint Mary's College community.
- Chamber Website: We are in the process of updating our Chamber website. <http://www.moragachamber.org/>. If you have suggestion about the website, please email edy321@comcast.net.
- Survey: The Chamber board is going to send our a survey to get its members input on 1) alternative days and times to meet 2) topics that would enhance your business and 3) activities that you feel would develop connections in our business community.

Orinda Chamber of Commerce, 24 Orinda Way, Orinda, www.orindachamber.org:

- February After Hours Mixer February 28th: 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. Jamie Westdal Photography 2 Theater Square, Suite 112, Orinda, CA
- The "Shop Orinda" campaign, launched in November 2007 has been a great hit, with the smart canvas shopping bags and tent cards appearing all through the city. So far, more than 600 bags have been distributed and 500 tent cards are in place among Orinda businesses.
- The Chamber needs your enthusiasm and expertise. Volunteer for an upcoming event or to participate on one of our committees by calling the Chamber office at 925-254-3909 or by email to our address at info@orindachamber.org.
- New Chamber members:
 - S. Justin Kim, C.P.A. www.justinkimcpa.com/
 - Private Associates Betsy Maness www.privateassociates.com
 - Orinda Pet Shop www.OrindaPetShop.com

If you have a business brief to share, please contact

Sophie Braccini at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

or contact

Lamorinda Weekly at 925-377-0977.



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What's Going On At The Rheem Center? Fudge Alley, a Moraga Business Icon, at a Turning Point

By Sophie Braccini



Inside Fudge Alley, home-made fudge, candy and ice cream in an old fashion decor
Photo Sophie Braccini

Frank Chao will be turning eighty this year. One could never tell, watching the Taiwanese shopkeeper interact joyfully with young dancers from the nearby California Academy of Performing Arts (CAPA), who come to satisfy their craving for sweets between two entrechats. Fudge Alley, Chao's candy and ice cream parlor, has been in operation for more than thirty years but the future is uncertain for the smooth old gentleman, who doesn't look much older than sixty, since he didn't renew his five-year lease with the Rheem Center's owner, Kimco Realty Corporation.

Chao considered this his American dream, a great place for retirement. But eating habits change and the business has been declining over the years. Still, Frank is a favorite. George Quintero, owner of the Moraga and Lafayette Pet Shoppes, says, "If somebody should get an award in Moraga, it's Frank. He's been a great presence in the Center for many, many years, taking care of everybody's kids." Another Moraga resident, now in his early thirties adds: "We used to go to Fudge Alley all the time with my parents when I was a kid. We had hotdogs, fudge, cookies and ice cream. Frank is definitely a Moraga icon."

For many teens, Fudge Alley has been a favorite "hang out," although this has not been without some controversy. Rumors link the shop to teenage delinquency, vandalism and other illegal activities that have occurred in the vicinity, but Moraga Police Chief Mark Ruppenthal believes that Frank Chao is an honest man.

Quintero identifies another reason why business owners at Rheem are having a hard time. "(The Rheem Center) has changed owners four times in the

last five years," he says, "and every time, the business property tax goes up and we, the tenants, are the ones paying for it."

The same thing happened to Beauty Source a few months ago; a proposed 25% increase in rent drove the store out of the Rheem Center. Both Beauty Source and the Karate and Fitness Place, another former Rheem business, have relocated to the Moraga Center.

At Rheem in the meantime, stores remain empty. Spaces once occupied by such businesses as Mia and Friends, Box Guy, Star Shoes, Beauty Source, 2nd Generation Consignment and Specialtees Outlet have been vacant for months. That may be the reason that Kimco is letting Chao stay in his store, with a month-to-month contract, until they have found a new tenant.

Edy Schwartz, President of the Chamber of Commerce of Moraga, comments, "The business community is concerned about what is going on at this shopping center. Shop keepers

are having a hard time reaching and communicating with the owner and have been unable to negotiate the significant rent increase that's been asked of them."

Grant Stubblefield of Lori's Perfect Tan, which is also located in the Rheem Center, says, "Our contract is up in less than a month and, in spite of repeated attempts, we have been unable to reach the responsible party at Kimco and still do not have a new contract proposal." The storeowner may consider not staying in Rheem if the increase is commensurate with what has been seen recently. "They are asking for Walnut Creek rent levels," says Stubblefield, "in a shopping center that has not been improved in years and where doing business is challenging." Kimco could not be reached for comment on this issue.

Meanwhile, Chao is contemplating a return to his homeland of Taiwan. "That's where I want my bones to be buried," says the smiling gentleman.

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