

Sweet Event at the Mercantile

By Sophie Braccini



Gold Ticket winners with their sweet selections Photo Andy Scheck

Do you still believe in a world of pure imagination? Five lucky children do. They found Golden Tickets in their Wonka Bars. And on Wednesday, March 12, those Golden Tickets gained them early entrance to the new Powell's Sweet Shoppe in the Lafayette Mercantile, and \$100 shopping spree.

At 4:30 pm, half hour before the crowd, Ella was the youngest to discover the store. The three year-old Lafayette pre-schooler entered the shop with her mother, brother and cousin in tow. She stepped into a world of colors and sweet smells, all presented in an appealing and organized way: the old fashion candies section, the everything-mint part, the British candies section, the international sector, the bulks, the high-end chocolates, the ice creams... "We have a special movie section," says beaming store manager Didi Reed, "we have a big screen with revolving 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' playing, old restored movie theater seats in which to relax and movie-like candies are stocked all around the screen." The store is adorned with Lafayette memorabilia, with pictures courtesy of the Lafayette Historical Society.

The Lafayette store is the 12th franchise of Michael Powell's original store. The first Powell's Sweet Shoppe opened in 2003 in Windsor, California -- a small, rural town located just north of Santa Rosa. Powell believes in the old-fashioned retail model where you get to know your customers, learn their names and involve yourself in the community where your store is located. Nabil and Zeina Hissen wanted to transport that same vision to Lafayette. "We are neighbors," say the Walnut Creek residents, "and we wanted a store in Lafayette, to get the community feel. Everybody here has been very welcoming."

The Wonka Bar promotion was a great idea. In the days preceding the opening, the owners distributed 1000 free candy bars to passers-

by, five containing a Golden Ticket. Jessie, a 10th grader at Campolindo High School was one of them. "I love everything sour," says the sophomore, "I found an amazing variety here." Her bag contained chocolate covered gummy bears, chocolate nonpareil, chewy sours and all kinds of colorful, sweet looking worms and beans.

Alessandra was visiting from Berkeley when she got the lucky bar. "I got some good chocolate here," says the young 3rd grader, showing a bar of Scharffenberger chocolate. "I have tons of bubble gums, M&M and sour Jelly Bellies." In the store, she found a 1961 DVD for her daddy and a birthday card for her younger brother. Kacey, a freshman at Acalanes High School, was lucky that parent Richard got a Golden Ticket. He shared it with her. "It's fantastic here," said the Walnut Creek resident, "they have collections of sweets for all ages and all at the same place." Adults can get hard-to-find candies like Flicks, wax lips, Big Hunks and Razzles; you have to be a certain age to know why those are special.

At 5pm sharp the store opened to the public. There was a rush of exited children and teens. In a time of fight against children obesity one could wonder about the value of such a store. "This is totally part of childhood," said a mother who'd rather stay unnamed, "kids won't come here everyday, but it's a fun place for an occasional treat, just to put a little more sweetness in our lives." Lafayette resident Laura Easley, Ella's mother, is adamant, "I'll probably be back once a week for myself, I love this place." Obviously the charming and slender mother needn't concern herself about her silhouette.

"We have a small non-sugar section in the back of the store that will grow," says Didi, "our sorbet from Gelato Classico in Concord are 85% fruit and one of our ice creams is sugarless." Pleasure without the guilt! Is that reasonable?

Powell's Sweet Shoppe is located at 3591 Mt. Diablo Boulevard.



The rush for sweets: Powell's opens the doors at Lafayette Mercantile