

Life in LAMORINDA

Moraga as a College Town?

By Sophie Braccini



SMC's Neal McSherry with the Terzetto's banner by the gym on game day
Photo Edy Schwartz

When she attended the last Moraga Chamber of Commerce meeting Roos Pal, owner of Terzetto Cuisine, heard music to her ears -- a way for her business to reach and attract the students that live on the nearby St Mary's College (SMC) campus. As Neal McSherry, SMC's Director of Ticket Sales, unfolded his plan to encourage student attendance at athletic games, the business community saw an opportunity to provide incentives alongside the campus for students to come and shop in town.

"We have set up a system of points that the students will earn as they come and cheer," explained McSherry. "The college has set in place a tracking system that allows us to automatically update the students' points. The points earn them prizes and benefits." McSherry thinks that the business community could be involved at two different levels: first by giving out coupons or merchandise to students who go and support campus sports and second, the businesses themselves could be part of the reward system. The St Mary's group has identified

twenty one local businesses that could interest students.

"I think this is great," says Pal. "I had been looking at ways to reach the students and had tried to talk to different people but had not been very successful. The opportunity presented at the Chamber was exactly what I was looking for." Wasting no time, McSherry and Pal launched the first operation on Sunday November 9th. Terzetto offered 200 "2 for 1" lunch coupons to the first students to come to the women's basketball home game. Additionally, she gave out four \$25 gift cards for students reaching a certain level of points. Pal is planning to continue working with the campus to provide them with new and interesting things on an ongoing basis.

"The college expects about 1200 visitors for each basketball game this season," says Moraga Chamber President Edy Schwartz, "we can find opportunities for our Moraga businesses to provide services or package discount plans for those games."

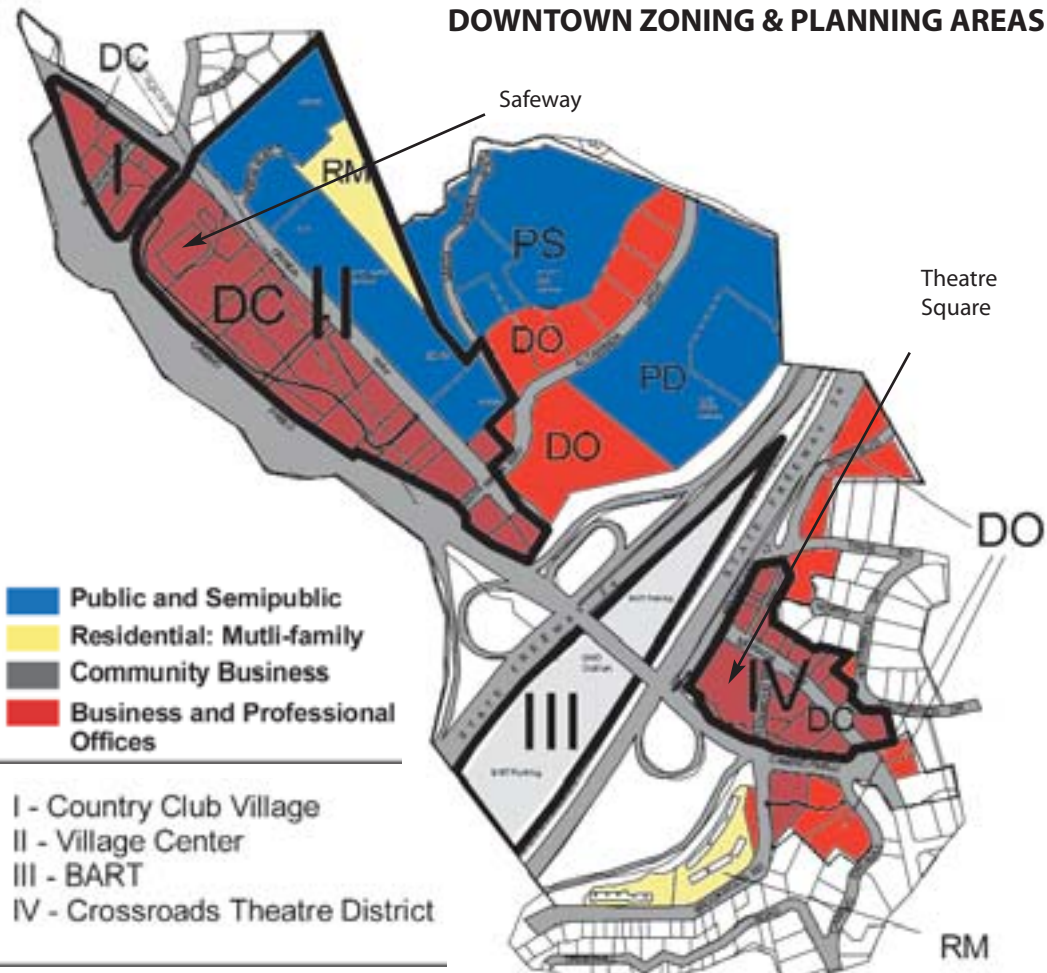
Schwartz would like to see folks come for an early dinner at one of Moraga's local establishments, or stop by afterwards for a drink or dessert to top off the evening. To entice SMC students to Shop Moraga First and work toward the integration of the college and the Town of Moraga has always been a key element in her platform.

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The Future of Orinda's Commercial Downtown Looks Bright

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DOWNTOWN ZONING & PLANNING AREAS



"We are thinking of three to four story buildings with retail at the street level and offices or living units upstairs." The group studied examples like the vibrant University Avenue in Palo Alto and the 55' high Mercantile building in Lafayette. "We want to leave open doors to trigger the creativity of designers and architects," says McCormick, "there are ways to build such units in a very attractive way with larger and smaller units, including some affordable ones." The group does not want to change the character of the town: "There are two types of areas in Orinda," adds McCormick, "the hills are semi-rural and the downtown can become a village with interesting stores and street side cafés."

In order to achieve "green" development in the downtown the choice of the task force is to provide incentive rather than setting rules. "Through history we've seen that restrictive rules have produced a dead downtown," says McCormick, "because that doesn't work, we want to provide incentives." A very enthusiastic promoter of sustainable construction practices himself, McCormick sees flex cars and shuttles, bi-and-tricycles and solar energy, all provided by developers who will receive a benefit in return.

To start convincing the many property owners in the center of Orinda, the members of the task force are meeting with all of them and advocating some type of coop-

eration. "Their first response is that they don't want to make changes because the town makes it difficult and the rents are low," recognizes McCormick. "One of my ideas to streamline the process is to replace the long public hearings by a document presenting the project that property owners could get their neighbors to sign. One of our big ideas in Orinda is to have neighbors come together and plan together."

But on its road to revitalization Orinda needs to meet some more challenges. Highway 24 and BART cut the city center in half. "It is dysfunctional," acknowledges Westin, "we have to live with it, possibly create some walkways with more interesting beautification." McCormick agrees that solving this problem would be very expensive "ideally we would build a pedestrian walkway from the theater to the village, with stores on both sides like the Ponte Vecchio."

Directly linked to this aspect of the topography is the difficult economic situation of Theater Square. "We had it working in 2000 when Intraware had a derogation to have its offices on the ground floor of the Square," recalls McCormick, "the foot traffic generated by the business helped all the retail around it." As part of the new plan, the rezoning of Theater Square would allow non-retail options on the ground floor in the back of the professional building.

Ultimately, it's the residents

who will make the decision. Starting as early as next month, a series of workshops will be conducted to get resident's ideas and comments. "I want to encourage all residents to attend the upcoming public workshops and provide input about how our downtown will look, feel and operate in the years to come," urges Smith. "I hope the public will participate," adds McCormick, "one problem in Orinda is that people who live here work very hard; it's often the same vocal minority that shows up. We really need to get people from all walks of life."

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