

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

[printer friendly](#)

[download pdf](#)

Published December 24th, 2008

Chambers of Commerce Reflect on 2008 and Look Toward the New Year

By *Sophie Braccini*



left to right: Larry Duson, Candy Kattenburg, Keith Miller, Edy Schwartz, Jay Lifson

Lamorinda's three Chambers of Commerce report that 2008 has been a pivotal year, while a challenging 2009 lies ahead.

In the meeting room of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, the Lafayette Chamber's President Larry Duson and Chief Executive Officer Jay Lifson were joined by Edy Schwartz, President of the Moraga Chamber, Keith Miller, President of the Orinda Chamber and Candy Kattenburg, the Orinda Chamber's Executive Director, to discuss their mission.

2008: A Year of Forging Stronger Community Relationships

Miller: "We have increased our presence in the community and established a much closer working relationship with the city. We added a signature event, with the support of Jay Lifson, and that was our first restaurant tour. We've grown our membership a bit, around 240, and started the Shop Orinda campaign."

Lifson: "2008 was a rewarding year and we've stepped up the relationship with the community. We got very involved opposing the increase in sales taxes; the business community came together and as a result the city didn't put that measure on the November ballot. Our events were very successful, and we grew our membership to 630."

Schwartz: "In 2008 we grew the membership to 130 (up from 100 in 2007). We worked hard to give our members value, organizing training about leasing and emergency preparedness, doubling the size of the Community Faire and the Season of Light."

Three Chamber-sponsored movements, Shop Orinda, Shop Moraga First and Try Lafayette First are participating in raising awareness that supporting local businesses is part of what makes communities.

Miller: "We have increased our visibility in the community with our 'Shop Orinda' bags campaign. By the way, we've just ordered the new round of bags, with a black and gold version. We bring value to our merchants with more than 3000 bags that people are using around town."

Lifson: "We started with a door to door campaign during the road work this summer and started the 'Try Lafayette First' campaign for the holidays. 'Shop local' programs are coming at the right time. Small businesses are finding it very difficult to get lines of credit and do business as usual. All of our cities need the sales tax, and by shopping here the dollars stay in the community and are re-circulated here. Small businesses participate in local communities more than the big boxes; they're the ones who give gift cards and baskets to auctions, who give to schools."

Schwartz: "'It's All Here' and 'Shop Moraga First' were developed this year. People are coming together as a community. We've been meeting with local groups and asking them to support our merchants, if they want those merchants to support their organizations. I believe that there is now an awareness of the importance of the survival of the small stores by the community."

The relationship of a Chamber to its city is important:

Miller: "I only have positive things to say -- our relationship with the city of Orinda has grown. The Council has helped us financially for our bags and the restaurant tour. We participate to the downtown planning process and know it will be a long project."

Lifson: "We can disagree with the town, and we are always asked for our point of view, we participate to the planning process and we have a wonderful working relationship with the town. If we don't feel that we are heard enough, we discuss the issue during a Board meeting and take a position in front of the council. We support the city council as much as we can; they have a very tough job. There are challenges to plan in a city that wants to stay semi-rural and still grow its business community. From the Chamber's point of view, the process to start a new business could be more business friendly."

Schwartz: "The relationship is growing, because the Chamber has established its presence. The town has supported us by waiving some fees. We want to work with the town to streamline the planning process for new businesses. A good example was the preparatory work for the sign ordinance that was done by the Planning Department for the business community."

2008 Was Tough, But

2009 Might Be Tougher

Duson: "We are making sure our entrepreneurs can continue to grow and we will help them with their needs. It can be more foot traffic, or sources of financing. We as Board members are going business to business to keep the level of awareness and enthusiasm high."

Lifson: "Our roles have changed, I don't know what 2009 will bring, but our role has grown beyond just organizing parties. The world is changing and we can make our members aware of other opportunities, or figure out where to find money when the old sources are drying out. Right now we spend three days a week responding to members who call for help: "We've run out of money; the internet is killing our business..." A Score representative is here every Tuesday and his agenda is full; we do a lot of referrals. As a business ourselves, we will have to become more efficient as well."

Miller: "I want to piggy back on what Jay (Lifson) said; we are not at the same level as Lafayette yet, but we will think and act differently in 2009. We will cooperate more, there are plenty of very smart people in our communities."

Schwartz: "Yes, we have to give our members value. They need to feel the connectedness, amongst ourselves and the community. Our goals in the three towns are similar and we want the same thing."

Kattenburg: "We are building a win, win, win."

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

[back to top](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA