

# Life in LAMORINDA

## Entrepreneurship One Option During Tough Economic Times

By Jennifer Wake



Lafayette technologist Robert Riebs discusses computer plans with Bobby and Navid Mazaheri at Town Hall Theatre Photo Jennifer Wake

With unemployment at around 11 percent in California, more people are considering striking out on their own. But what does it take to succeed as an entrepreneur? And what should you know before venturing out?

Lafayette resident Bobby Mazaheri, a recent graduate from UC Davis in Computer Arts, started X-Gaming Academy to teach 10-17 year olds how to create video games, but has added Web design to his repertoire lately due to an increase in demand.

"I'm seeing a lot more people going out on their own lately," he said.

One of those people is Bobby's brother Navid Mazaheri, 22. After completing a bachelor's degree in computer engineering at San Jose State University, last summer he decided to start his own business - SF Bay Area PC Repair - in Orinda, offering technology solutions.

Navid focused on his few clients, knowing that if he did a great job, and had reasonable prices, word would spread. He also wasn't afraid to talk to people about what he did and seek out help from other professionals.

While at a wedding, Navid spoke with Robert Riebs, a technologist/educator who owns MyTechnologist in Lafayette and has been in the technological business for over 25 years. "We started talking about iPhones, and exchanged business cards," he said. "I told him I was having

issues, and he said, 'Work with me. If you help me out, I'll help you out.'"

In addition to servicing his regular clients, Navid now works with Riebs as an apprentice. "He's given me advice about how to work with clients, how to access client computers remotely, how to stay focused."

"These guys can go into Twitter and other technologies without blinking," Riebs said. "Different generations start in different places. So I ask: What do I know? What does he know? How can we help each other?"

After a flood devastated the Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette, Riebs was contracted to re-create the entire technological infrastructure from the ground up. Navid (and his brother, Bobby) are helping out.

"All the wiring was destroyed in the flood," Navid said. "Robert and I started ripping everything out, ran wires inside, set up the phone and Internet, and then brought all the computers back." For Navid, it was a wonderful experience. "I'd never done anything start to finish before."

Moraga resident Annette Paczocha, 24, decided to join the ranks of entrepreneurs last December when she started East-bay Spanish, a learning program for children ages 6 to 10. After teaching Spanish in an after-school program at Del Rey Elementary, she saw a need for students to keep up the work during the summer so they wouldn't have to relearn every-

thing in the fall.

She created brochures and a Web site, but found she was limited by how she could distribute her information at school sites. She began bringing flyers to every outlet she could think of. "It doesn't matter where you go," she said. "Nail supply, Kinko's." She began to get calls, but scheduling was difficult and by the time summer started, she didn't have enough kids to make it worthwhile.

She's undeterred, however. "I'm going to start earlier next year. Persistence is key, and not being afraid to approach people to talk about what you're doing," she said.

As owner of Successful Solutions - a project management firm - Caryl Morrison of Orinda understands the importance of people. Morrison says the more people you can talk to, the better.

Two years ago she changed the direction of her business and relocated to Orinda. Looking for ways to connect with new business people, she joined the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and regularly attends its Entrepreneur Club, which meets the third Thursday of every month.

"My business is extremely relationship-based," she said. "Joining the Chamber was what works for me and for my business. There was nobody at the Chamber that I knew and it was a great opportunity for me to meet new people, build new relationships and use members as resources."

Caroline McCormick, who owns Association Communications, Inc., in Lafayette was able to retain clients from her previous company when she started her business. While she was good at her job, she said she had no idea how to run a company.

She advises anyone considering starting a business to learn about HR, Finance, Marketing, and put together a good team to service the organization including an attorney, CPA and insurance broker.

Other entrepreneurs suggest starting small while you're still employed. Orinda resi-

dent Matthew Leutza started a tutoring business, Lamorinda Tutoring, three years ago as a supplement to his college and K-12 teaching schedule while pursuing his master's degree. "The extra income was nice since teaching salaries are low," he said. "After a while, I established a strong clientele through referrals and limited advertising."

Like most entrepreneurs, Leutza really enjoys being his own boss. "If you have a skill that is in demand, you must be willing to work hard and meet the needs of your clients," he said. "Punctuality, flexibility, reliability, and integrity are simple keys to success."

"I think you work harder when you work for yourself, than you might when working for someone else," added McCormick, "but the rewards are wonderful."

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### "Making the Right Choices"



As a California native Luita Swales, grew up in Oakland and always knew that she would one day go to Cal. Her mother acquired both a B.A. and M.A., which, according to Luita, was unusual back in "those days."

However, after graduating from high school in 1950, Luita was challenged financially even though her mother had obtained a position with Standard Oil. Luita said, "...my father walked out when I was 3 years old, leaving behind a good sized debt." Being a woman of determination, she never let that sway her belief that one day she would follow in her mother's footsteps.

During high school she was the winner of a writing competition that offered a substantial scholarship from the San Francisco Press and Union League Club, which she readily accepted. She recalled, "The only proviso was that I had to major in Journalism, which is how I eventually came to be one of the editors of the Daily Cal, the student newspaper."

After a brief marriage she returned to Cal Berkeley to attend graduate school and in the process of writing her Master's thesis discovered that she was really good with numbers. She said, "I enjoyed quantitative analysis more than word synthesis, so I switched over from words into numbers." Eventually she earned her Master of Arts in Biostatistics; she then enrolled in the PhD program later transferring to UCLA to complete her PhD.

Reflecting back on her days at Cal, she fondly recalls, "I had taken a part-time job for the City of Berkeley Public Health Department where I met the love of my life." After a long courtship of six years and commuting back and forth from the Bay Area to the campus of UCLA she and Glenn Lynch were married. Glenn brought three sons to the marriage that embraced Luita as part of the family, a relation-

by Denise Lemings

ship that continues to date. With great affection she says, "They love me and we visit quite often."

Luita worked for many years for the Alameda County Health Department, and eventually retired as Director of Finance at Highland Hospital.

When asked why and how she came to live at The Moraga Royale, she replied, "I lived in Lafayette for almost 40 years and had moved to Rossmore after my husband passed away in 2004. I had recently begun to have minor medical challenges and wanted to find the right place for me while I was still in charge, making my own decisions. I worked hard all my life so financially I could live anywhere. I took two and a half months researching and visiting many, many places, I think fifteen or sixteen in all, I didn't keep count really."

Luita found The Moraga Royale's staff to be of the most importance in making her decision, saying, "Other places may be newer but when I walked down the hall and the housekeeper and caregiver looked me in the eye, smiled and said hello, that did it for me, I knew this was the place for me."

Luita maintains her independence and her relationships with her family, church and community and is very involved at St. Stephen's in Orinda, in addition to frequently driving to Rossmore to visit and attend various functions throughout the month. When asked to sum up how she feels about choosing Moraga Royale, she leans forward and says with assurance, "Life's about making choices and I feel like I made the right one, I feel safe and secure here."



Luita works in her office suite at Moraga Royale

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