

Published November 11th, 2009

Moraga Becomes More Business Friendly

By Sophie Braccini



Town Council Member Karen Mendonca (3rd from right) attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Curves' new location at the Rheem Center Photo Andy Scheck

move. In recent years the town has asked for a \$3,600 deposit from applicants, which could be partially refunded if not used. At the Council meeting Planning Director Lori Salamack spoke in favor of the project. "The town has a policy to pass on to users the cost of the permits we issue in accordance with legislation," said the Director, "but retail is suffering in this economy and we are aware of the fact that businesses benefit from the proximity of others and vibrant shopping centers are good for business, which ultimately is of benefit to the Town's finances through sales tax." All those who took the stand that night spoke in favor of the measure, including Chamber of Commerce vice-president Larry Tessler. "I believe that businesses should pay these fees in normal times," he said, "but these are especially tough times. We need to balance the short term cost against sales tax benefit in the long term." Commenting after the fact the owner of the Moraga Center, Joan Bruzzone, expressed her satisfaction. "I was thrilled that the town did this," Bruzzone said. "By this resolution I believe the town realizes the importance of being more 'user' friendly if they want prospective retailers to be aware that Moraga is receptive and welcomes new retailers to join and make a positive impact on our town. It was a very positive step," she explained. Bruzzone added that in order to further support its retail, the town could rethink the various regulatory measures that prospective merchants must face in order to establish their businesses. "The less rules and regulations that face the prospective merchant the better," she concluded. Dave Reynolds who recently moved his Curves facility from a Kimco Realty Corp. owned space to another Rheem center building, closer to Moraga Road, was very positive as well. "Whatever the town can do to help businesses is good," said Reynolds. He was not concerned that the town's policy would encourage more businesses to leave the Rheem Center, "If businesses leave Rheem it is because of the landlord's policy, not because of the town," he said. Other Rheem Center merchants did not wish to comment further.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA

When Bill Snyder met with Grant Stubblefield in early October it was to talk about Snyder's Moraga Hardware web site, but soon the two started discussing the move of Loards Ice Cream from the Rheem Center to the empty space in the Moraga Center that was formerly home to Wolf Camera. "Grant's aunt owns that store," says Snyder, "so I was eager to know if he had news, since the store would move close to mine."

That's when Snyder says he learned a troubling fact: "The town was asking Loards for \$3,600 in fees," he said. "This is not business friendly, in this economy when we are losing businesses, that policy is not common sense." Snyder jumped into action; he called, and sent an email to, Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter asking him to do something. "(Trotter) replied that he was aware of the situation and that the issue was already scheduled to be on the next agenda so the whole Council could discuss it," remembers Snyder.

A temporary reduction in select business fees was on the agenda of the October 14th session of the Town Council. "We want to demonstrate that the Town wishes to attract businesses," said Mayor Trotter. The new ordinance will waive, during the next two years, the land use permit and conditional use permit for businesses moving into vacant spaces within an existing building. The land use permit is \$500 and the cost of the conditional use permit varies depending on the extent of the findings town staff has to make when a new business arrives and whether neighboring businesses oppose the