



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published January 6th, 2010

## "Ladies Night Network" - Caveat Emptor?

By Cathy Tyson

"She sold us on a dream, took our money and never attempted to make good on her promises. We have all been disheartened and I think many are afraid to come forward out of embarrassment. Even if I don't get my money back, I would like to see her scheme stopped," said Lynell Lewis.

Lewis is describing a possible scam by a woman who, according to Sergeant Gwen Brady of the Lafayette Police Department, uses a number of aliases. This woman contacted independent sales representatives who sold merchandise that appealed to women and offered to schedule events called "Ladies Night Network" at her salon on Lafayette Circle which her affluent clients would attend. "She is very savvy. She has bilked residents of Lafayette and the community out of \$14,000" said Sgt. Brady. "Although there were some elements of fraud, what she did was more of a civil matter than criminal." Most of the women involved paid \$600 or more for networking parties that didn't occur and never received a refund.

This appears not to be an isolated incident. Contra Costa Superior Court records show that two suits against this woman were filed in Small Claims Court for identical complaints in December, 2007 and March, 2008. There was an additional suit related to her salon business in February, 2007. All these actions culminated in judgments for failure to appear totaling \$1,993.

"Clearly this is a scam that is working well for her. If you give excuses to law enforcement and don't show up in court, you're not held accountable" alleges Teresa Torbett. Back in 2008, Torbett was restarting her business and received a referral through her company website. The subject offered the opportunity to join a networking group. According to Torbett, they met at her Lafayette Circle beauty shop, and for \$600 she could participate in six different parties throughout the year - "It seemed like a reasonable and legitimate thing," she said. "I felt like an idiot, it was difficult to acknowledge that I had been set up."

Torbett went to the Contra Costa District Attorney's Office to see if something could be done. "Generally speaking - in order to prove a crime happened you have to prove intent to defraud at the time the money was taken," said Deputy District Attorney Gary Koepfel in a recent phone interview. "The key issue is the intent to defraud - I looked for an indication that she didn't intend to hold an event." He went on to say that there was one event held - even though it was poorly attended. In addition, "Our white collar unit is short staffed and we have no investigator due to budget cuts." The District Attorney set up mediation, but the subject backed out at the last minute. He suggested the "Ladies Night Networking" participants could go to Small Claims Court.

Unsatisfied, Torbett went to the Federal Trade Commission and the California Department of Consumer Affairs and filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau. "I want to see justice done. It bothers me that law enforcement is tied," she said.

There are numerous women who have similar stories. "We met at her salon in Lafayette and she told me about the network. I was very interested in getting dates booked," said Lei Hocking. "I agreed on a range of dates and actually held my first event in May. I had a bad feeling as I was arriving for the event, it felt like a scam, and it certainly turned out that way. I tried to hold my future events and was never able to. She dropped out of contact and from then on I have not received a refund nor has a satisfactory solution been provided. I paid \$800 to her and I have a copy of the cancelled check with her fingerprints on it."

The Lamorinda Weekly attempted to reach the subject at an email address provided by one of the alleged victims. Just before publication, we received this response: "I will forward this information to my attorney at Parker & Stansbury, this is NOT at all true, I have rented space in the past to independent business owners, I have been notified that they had a lapse in communication with a woman in charge, and efforts have been made to clear up any miscommunication, if my name appears in this article [sic] without my permission I will pursue a suit for slander."

Others who participated in "Ladies Night Networking" parties are invited to contact Teresa Torbett at [teresa.torbett@astound.net](mailto:teresa.torbett@astound.net) for further information.

Reach the reporter at: [cathy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA