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What's Up on Brown?

By Sophie Braccini

“This is not just Brown Avenue, it’s funky town!” exclaimed Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, at a recent Chamber mixer on Brown Ave. Recently new businesses have moved to the strip between Deer Hill Rd. and Mount Diablo Blvd., and are bringing new life to this eastern area of Lafayette. These blocks on Brown Ave. have always been a mixed-use area, with destination businesses, apartment buildings and private cottages. “All roads lead to Brown,” says newcomer Anthony Ruiz of FastFrame, who relocated to 1020 Brown two months ago, “we want to make this district an alternative to the downtown area.”

When his father bought the building at 1021 Brown 45 years ago, Rick Humann, then a child, remembers that one of the first things they bought was an alarm. “I wouldn’t say that the area was scary, but it was mostly run down residential buildings,” he recalls. Humann Co., Inc. was then, and

still is, a civil engineering, surveying and land planning consulting firm that does most of its work in Contra Costa and Alameda counties with a good share in Lafayette. “I think it is great to have more vibrancy on Brown,” says the business owner, “and it is still less crowded because we are a bit removed from downtown.”

“This area is part of the discussion of the Lafayette Specific Plan,” says Lifson, “the new businesses that are coming here are just making it happen.” Carol Hensley, owner of the Cotton Patch at 1025 Brown, could not agree more. “I’ve been here since 1983,” she says, “the city has tried to decide what kind of business can go where, but I think that it is better to just let it be.” Hensley has seen the changes over the years and is very pleased with the more sophisticated businesses that are coming in. “We’ve changed the dynamic of the street, don’t put your fingers into it!” she adds.

Hensley has been active in making Brown a vibrant business street. “In 1994 I started to hold an outdoor quilt show, closing the street for one Saturday,” she remembers, “and we did it for nine years.” Hensley stopped because some residents of the area did not enjoy the party. “I’d like to learn more about what Carol did with her Quilt Show,” says Anthony Ruiz, owner of FastFrame, “I would love to be able to close Brown for a Saturday/Sunday art show.”

FastFrame used to be in the Clocktower Building on Mt. Diablo Blvd. “We get as much business here as we did on Mount Diablo,” says Ruiz, “there is less traffic, but we are a destination and we have much better parking.” The additional benefit of ample parking is that Dave Simpson parks his ‘Big Blue’ book-mobile there every Saturday.

Ruiz, an avid reader, loves his partnership with Simpson. “Reading is important for the development of the brain,” he believes, “it fosters a different type of thinking, like art, it’s not linear, it is out of the box, you go somewhere in your mind.” This partnership is just one of many Ruiz would like to see happen. The Chamber mixer, for example, took place on his parking lot and was co-sponsored by two other newcomers to Brown, Al-

ternatives for Animals and Creative Alterations.

“I have had an eye on that location on Brown for years (number 1048),” says Creative Alteration’s owner Josef Jamkochian. He particularly appreciates the better parking for his customers. Veterinarian Karen Retig, who opened her Alternatives for Animals clinic in a quaint cottage at 1042 Brown, agrees that business is good on Brown. “We are aiming at creating a little community here,” said Retig, “we need to network more so we can address issues together.” One such issue is that drivers does not always respect the 25 mile per hour speed limit.

John Marquez, of Artisan Bistro, does not see anything special about Brown. “It’s just another street,” he said. But if his business neighbors have their way, the creative and eclectic thoroughfare will become the place to be in Lafayette.

Other businesses on Brown include Cleanse and Wellness, Inc at 1030, Rosie’s Upscale Consignments at 1020, Image Excellence Salon at 1038, and DTN Nail Care and Lafayette Auto Repair that occupy the two corners at Mount Diablo Blvd.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.



Steve Snyder, Jay Lifson and Norma Evans having a good time on Brown
Photo Sophie Braccini

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business briefs

Acalanes Recognizes Businesses Contributions



left-right: Kip Bruzzone, Bo McSwine, Mike Ivankovich, Dan Stokes, Jim Lucas
Photo Doug Kohen

Acalanes High School offered local businesses Diablo Foods, Bo’s, JV Lucas and Jacksons framed jerseys, as a special thank you for the consistent contributions they have made to the Acalanes football program.

Orinda Optometry Group Honored

20 Orinda Way, Orinda, 253-1320

On Tuesday, October 5, Orinda’s Mayor Thomas McCormick honored the Orinda Optometry Group with a special Proclamation recognizing its 25th anniversary, an anniversary also shared with the City of Orinda. Dr. Weylin Eng, his daughter, Dr. Kristine Eng, and Dr. Kelly Shintani were on hand to receive this proclamation in the presence of the council members and the community at the City Council meeting. The proclamation revealed the rich history of the Orinda Optometry Group, its inception in July 1985 by Drs. Weylin Eng and his cousin, Colleen Tashiro. Council member Amy Worth added words of appreciation to Dr. Weylin Eng for his years of dedicated service to the U.C. Berkeley School of Optometry, Miramonte High School, the Orinda Rotary Club, and the Orinda Library. The proclamation concluded with an acknowledgement of the Group’s outstanding contribution to improving the quality of life for the Citizens of Orinda for 25 years.

Nerd4Rent Buys DiabloLink Communications.

990 Moraga Rd, Lafayette, www.Nerd4Rent.com, 283 5666



Steve Angelides and Edward Zeidan
Photo provided

“I’m delighted to announce that as of October 1st we began serving the clients of DiabloLink Communications,” said Edward Zeidan of Nerd4Rent. “Renee, Mark and I would like to extend a warm welcome to Steve and Doug’s (DiabloLink) clients. We look forward to getting to know them and taking care of any technical support needs they have.” It was tragedy that led Moraga’s Steve Angelides to sell the business. His partner Doug King, a 57-year old Moraga resident, died suddenly of kidney cancer last June. “It was not possible to continue alone,” said Angelides, “we were on call 24/7, it was really a two-person job.” Angelides said he misses customers and King, who was a partner and a friend. He is now the Executive Director of the California Association of Workplace Investigators, caowi.org.

New Sales Associate for Coldwell Banker

5 Moraga Way, Orinda 788-2950, e-mail Marian.Krochka@CBNORcal.com

Marian Krochka joins Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Orinda from Security Pacific Real Estate, where she has been working for the past seven years. She has been a real estate agent for 20 years and holds licenses in both California and Hawaii where she has a second home. “She is a highly experienced agent and, having lived in Contra Costa County for more than 30 years, has a personal and intimate perspective on the neighborhoods that she serves,” said manager Val Cook-Watkins.

Under New Ownership: Lamorinda Pizza

382 Park St, Moraga (Rheem Shopping Center) 376 4040



Photo Sophie Braccini

John and Adriana McGrath, Campolindo and Acalanes grads, respectively, recently bought Moraga’s Lamorinda Pizza. The place is open six days a week from 4:30 to 9pm and does mostly catering and delivery. “We changed the menu quite a bit, we improved the ingredients and the quality of what we offer is much higher,” says McGrath going to explain that using higher quality cheese and meats, buying local ingredients, hand rolling the dough, and adding texture to the bottom of the pizza, is what it takes to create the type of excellent products his clients seek. “We are doing a very popular pesto chicken, a barbecue chicken pizza, and will introduce more off the wall items within a few months,” he adds. McGrath says he’s been in the pizza industry for half of his life. Now age 28, he says he started working at local pizza venues when he was 15. Adriana McGrath previously worked for Domenico’s in Danville. “I love what I do and I’m very happy to be where I am,” says McGrath, “we do a lot of business with the local schools and want to expand it.” As far as the night business at Rheem is concerned, the couple plans to remodel the place and hopefully add seating. “Our focus is quality, consistency and customer service,” says McGrath, “and we are staying very competitive with good pricing.” So far McGrath is happy with the response to his new menu and is proud of the recent 5-stars rating he got on Yelp.com.

News from the three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette
18th Annual Lafayette Reservoir Run on October 31, from 6:30-10:30am in downtown Lafayette. For more information http://lafayettechamber.org/events/reservoir-run/.

The 2010 Mega-Chamber Business Expo on November 4, from 4-7pm at Crowne Plaza Hotel, 45 John Glenn Drive, Concord. Lafayette businesses can participate as an Exhibitor or Sponsor or as a Food or Beverage Vendor. For more information contact Barbara Gilmore at 284-7404.

Coffee with out-going Mayor Brandt Andersson on November 5, from 8-9am at the Chamber Office. A question and answer opportunity on city issues and the recent election.

Chamber Mixer on November 10, from 5:30-7pm at Alta Bates Summit Women’s Health Center, 3595 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Suite 350.

Moraga
General Chamber Meeting on Friday, November 19 at the Hacienda de las Flores from 7:30-9am. Meet and Greet, coffee and hot muffins followed by elections and Chamber business.

Orinda
The Orinda Chamber of Commerce has partnered with the Fees To Funds credit card processing program to help raise funds for the Orinda Community Foundation. If your business takes credit cards as a form of payment from your customers, you would be an ideal candidate for Fees to Funds. The service turns a portion of an existing expense - your credit card processing fees - into ongoing monthly cash donations to the Orinda Community Foundation. The beauty of this program is that it does not cost a penny - you are paying these merchant account fees already. With Fees To Funds a significant portion of these fees, 25% of the gross revenue from your account, will be donated directly to the Orinda Community Foundation on your behalf, every month. For details on how you can participate in the program, please directly contact the Fees To Funds at FeesToFunds.com.

Chamber Mixer on Thursday, 11/11, 5:30-7pm at Orinda Motors, 63 Orinda Way. Open to Chamber members and their guests.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact
Sophie Braccini
at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com
or call the office 925-377-0977