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## City and Chamber Celebrate 'Try Lafayette First'

By Sophie Braccini



Ben Mahoney (left) of Mountain Mike's Pizza hosted the party with Jay Lifson, Carol Federighi, Don Tatzin, Brandt Andersson and Dave Simpson. Photo Sophie Braccini

Sales tax revenue is up in Lafayette; for the last fiscal year, revenues increased 4.7% over the same period last year—a fact that could create a bit of revenue-envy in other cities. Some of this success can be credited to the awareness-raising efforts of the 'Try Lafayette First' campaign initiated three years ago by the Chamber of Commerce to educate residents about the economic benefits of shopping locally. Recently the City Council acknowledged the campaign's success and issued a Proclamation honoring the program.

On June 16 a festive celebration was organized at Mountain Mike's Pizza in Lafayette, where City officials, Chamber staff and merchants came together, congratulated each other, and renewed their energy and commitment to the economic vitality of Lafayette.

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jay Lifson and Dave Simpson, chair of the Try Lafayette First Committee, agree that one of the most effective ways the Chamber

reached out to residents was the launch of the pledge campaign. "More than 1500 residents pledged that they would 'Try Lafayette First' when making a decision to shop for something, seek out a service or go to a restaurant," said Lifson, "I think that most people now get it, and understand that shopping local brings sales tax revenue that pays for road repairs, police and city services."

"At the beginning of the year, we met with Chamber members and brainstormed what we wanted to

achieve this year with 'Try Lafayette First,'" says Simpson, "many ideas were floated around, but most frequently merchants asked that we improve our synergy with the city and local non-profits." Simpson believes that Lafayette businesses need to feel supported and acknowledged by the City. The first action in that direction was the 'walk-about-businesses' that took City Council members from business to business, with a Try Lafayette First ambassador, to meet local business people. "I personally took Mayor Carl Anduri to meet those business owners whom I knew had an old grudge with the City," remembers Simpson, "the dialogue was very genuine and led to action."

"Where would you prefer to live," asked Simpson during his short speech at the party, "in Carmel or Emeryville?" suggesting that the shopping experience makes a town and that it is the individual, locally-owned businesses that create that unique charm; they are the ones that give back to local schools and charities.

Simpson will be stepping down as committee chair to attend to his Big Blue Bookmobile; Lifson is currently recruiting a new volunteer.

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## business briefs

**Diablo Foods Fights Back**  
Also supports Afghanistan fundraiser  
3615 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette  
(925) 283-0737



Customers are fed and entertained courtesy of Diablo Foods. Photo Sophie Braccini

On Friday June 17, Diablo Foods of Lafayette started a series of "Street-Eats-On-Us" events celebrating the stores 43rd anniversary. The party will be repeated on June 21st and 28th, from 11am-3pm, when the family-owned business will offer free entertainment, drinks and food. "This is our way to say thank you to the community for their support," says Connie Collier, daughter of Diablo Foods founder Ed Stokes, "since the opening of Whole Foods on the other side of town our business has declined a bit but has stayed sound. Customers come to me all the time and tell me 'we want you to stay open, we will continue to support you.'" At last Friday's event a band was playing Sinatra songs, while smoothies and sandwiches were graciously offered to customers. Some seemed bewildered; others stopped, had something to eat or drink and engaged in conversation with Stokes, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jay Lifson, or Chamber Board member Larry Duson, who all came by to support the local independent grocery. One day earlier, Diablo Foods opened its doors to Shakira Niazi, founder of Salvare La Vita Water LLC, a non-profit that aims at building wells in Afghanistan by selling local spring water, in what she claims to be 100% biodegradable bottles, and directing

the profit to well-building. Niazi, a San Ramon resident, says she has been a supporter of Budd Mackenzie's Trust in Education for over four years and that in many ways her social business was inspired by him. "I've come up with a simple and yet measurable plan," says Niazi, "no donations are required; for every 31 bottles purchased, one person will have access to clean drinking water for 20 years, by building water wells for those in need." The first project was located in Sheberghan with 10 water wells, which should supply 7,500 villagers. Diablo Foods will carry VITA water in its bottled water section. For more information go to: [slvwater.com](http://slvwater.com).

**Tarbinian Returns to Lafayette**  
**Ace Auto Electric and Air**

3430 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Unit B (inside the old Butler-Conti Dodge dealership)  
284-5550, [aceautoelectricandair.com](http://aceautoelectricandair.com)

Don't tell Sedrak Tarbinian that he is a car mechanic. The American gentleman of Persian-Armenian origin would show you his repair shop where, if cars are idle with their hoods opened, not a spot of grease or the faintest smell of gasoline can be detected. Tarbinian is an electrical and air conditioning expert, a trade he started in Lafayette 30 years ago. He moved to Los Angeles to be with his family, but returned to Contra Costa, until he could find a place in his beloved Lafayette. "People in Lafayette have class," he says, "they are well traveled and it is a pleasure to do business with them." He welcomes back his old customers and looks forward to meeting new ones.



Sedrak Tarbinian in his new Lafayette store. Photo Sophie Braccini

**New from the three Chambers of Commerce**

- Lafayette**
- Green Committee Open Meeting, June 28, noon-1pm in the Lafayette Chamber Conference Room.
  - Shop Lafayette Committee Meeting, July 12, noon-1pm in the Lafayette Chamber Conference Room.
  - Joint "Cinco" Mixer with Moraga, Orinda, Walnut Creek & Hispanic Chambers at Veterans Memorial Building, 3780 Mt. Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette on July 13, 5:30-7pm.
- Moraga**
- June 25 at 6pm: First Anniversary Party for the New Rheem Theater. Tickets for the evening performance are \$25 each and tax deductible, and include light refreshments—food from Pennini's Restaurant, and wine. (See article page A4). The event is a fundraiser for improving the elevator and the sound system.
  - 5A Rent A Space and Neighborhood Computers are co-sponsoring a Chamber Mixer on Tuesday, June 28, 6:00-8pm, 455 Moraga Road Ste. F. Music, hors d'oeuvres, beverages offered by the co-sponsors.
- Orinda**
- Business Neighborhood Watch Meeting, Tuesday, June 28, 8am at Table 24 Restaurant, 2 Theatre Square. This meeting will continue the discussion about the creation of a business neighborhood watch program. The Orinda Police Department will work collaboratively with the business community to create a downtown program to promote awareness and discourage crime targeted at Orinda businesses.
  - The Orinda Chamber invites business owners to enter their stores in a new local business decorating contest for the 4th of July. Judging by the Mayor will take place on Friday, July 1st and awards will be announced on July 4th in the park. "Let's make the town look festive, even if it is just an American flag in front of your business or on your service truck," says Chamber President Sue Breedlove.
  - Save the date: Celebrate Everyday Heroes Orinda Community Association Golf Tournament on Monday, July 25, 10:30am-6pm at the Orinda Country Club, 315 Camino Sobrante.

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