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New Year, New Businesses, and for Store Owners, New Adventures

By Sophie Braccini

Lamorinda may not be immune to the economic crisis—a few businesses have closed and we've seen some home foreclosures—but for the most part, the three communities remain active and vibrant. Sales tax revenue is showing modest improvement and some local stores are doing very well. Featured here are a few businesses that recently opened in the Lamorinda area, and there are more.

Tiny Feet
2 Theater Square, Orinda
317-3062



Milena Mitkin in Tiny Shoes

Milena Mitkin just opened Tiny Feet in Orinda's Theater Square with her husband, Marko. Nicely located across from Sweet Dreams, the tastefully decorated boutique offers a selection of quality and creative infant and children's shoes from all over the world, with brands such as Chooze, Garvalin, Primigi, and the adorable American-made Joyfolie Shoes. "We wanted to bring high-end kids shoes to Lamorinda," says Mitkin.

This business is the couple's first retail venture. He is an attorney, she was in the insurance business, and they are raising their two young boys in Moraga. "We were welcomed and supported by Theater Square's management as soon as we presented our project," says Mitkin, "everyone believes that there is a need for such a store, that savvy and sophisticated parents are looking for the durable and unique selection we offer here."

Glamorous
1048 Brown Avenue, Lafayette
284-5636

In Lafayette, Eliza Jambokian just opened her first fashion boutique. Glamorous is a special occasion and cocktail dress store where mothers-of-the-bride and women who want an elegant look can find an assortment of shapes, fabrics and colors that will accommodate many tastes. An Acalanes graduate, the young woman's shop is next to her father's Creative Alteration and Dry Cleaning at 1048 Brown Avenue. "There is a good



Eliza Jambokian in Glamorous

synergy between our two businesses," she says, "and the business community on Brown is growing, creating a very good environment for retail." The seasonal boutique is currently offering a collection geared to the holidays and the cold weather. "Come February I will have bridal dresses, then I will add the spring and summer fashions in the same spirit of special occasions," says Jambokian, who was a design specialist at Nordstrom, and worked for five years as a visual merchandiser and manager in retail stores. For her own store she's done extensive research into brands that would appeal to local women; tailored, classy outfits with a bit of sexiness, and she tried to keep it reasonably priced. She carries brands such as Due Per Due and Sangria, among many others. "As soon as I started bringing dresses into my father's store, even before I could open my own, they started selling," says Jambokian. "I am very excited for my first business—I am expressing my creativity here and believe it will be very successful."

L Silhouettes
518 Center St., Moraga
247-5098



Gabriel Torres in L Silhouettes

A few doors from TJ Maxx, a new gift/toy store, L Silhouettes, opened just in time for the Christmas season. Owner Lulu Tor-

res' brother, Gabriel, was in the store when we paid them a visit. "The Christmas season has been good for the business," he said, "it was like we were the talk of the town!" The store is quite large and still has ample room for more merchandise. "We wanted to have more things for Christmas, but we were so new that we couldn't get all we wanted," says Lulu Torres. Right now the store has a nice assortment of games such as Legos, stuffed animals, porcelain collectibles and jewelry for different age groups. "We've had parents coming in for gifts for teens and tweens and we suggested Hello Kitty jewelry, or some of our very nice watches," says Torres, adding that many people are asking for more toys and that she's happy to hear suggestions from customers. "We are getting Japanese crystal 3D puzzles in the coming days, and more. People should check us out and we'll get what they want if we don't have it already!" says the eager young businesswoman who, with L Silhouettes, is starting her first business in Moraga.

Wonderful Spa
450 Center St., Moraga
376-9988



Coco Zhang and Joel Schaffer in Wonderful Spa

Photos Sophie Braccini

Open for just a few months, Wonderful Spa is already creating a customer base with clients such as Orinda resident Joel Schaffer. We found him conversing in fluent Mandarin with owner Coco Zhang after a relaxing treatment in the little massage parlor nestled between TJ Maxx and Tuesday Morning in the Rheem Center. "We have quite a lot of foot traffic from people who come to the big stores," says Zhang, "and we are growing from repeat customers and word of mouth." This Moraga business, which is not affiliated with the Wonderful Spa Center in Orinda, does have a sister establishment located in Danville. Wonderful Spa specializes in foot massage, also known as reflexology, as well as full body massage. The cost for an hour of reflexology is \$25 and for a full body massage, \$40.

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

business briefs

Orinda Chemist Elected 2013 President of ACS

Marinda Li Wu was elected last month the 2013 American Chemist Society (ACS) President. The long time Orinda resident will serve as president-elect in 2012, president in 2013, and immediate past-president in 2014 of the ACS Board of Directors. ACS, with 163,000 members, is the world's largest scientific society. Wu was elected after what she considered a fierce battle in which her main rival was a scientist from the National Research Center (NRC) in Washington D.C. "Scientists are not used to running campaigns," said Wu, "but after I was asked by many different people to run for president and I decided to start a campaign last year."

Wu is known in Lamorinda for her advocacy for scientific education. "I started the Family Science Night at OIS in 1997," explains the woman who's raised two kids in Orinda, "there are so many labs and scientists in the Bay Area—it is easy to find volunteers ready to help." The chemist also started the Science Café geared for adults in Orinda that is now operating every month in Lafayette through a partnership with the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation.

Wu believes that kids should be introduced to science at an early age. She launched the non-profit Science Is Fun! that conducts after-school and summer camp science education in Lamorinda. With her new global responsibilities (Wu wants to increase ACS ties around the world), she will not have a lot of time for local advocacy, but she wants to continue supporting on-going science awareness.

Chamber's Jay Lifson is Lafayette's Business Person of the Year

The Marquis Business Person of the Year award is given to an individual who supports the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce's mission: To promote and maintain the healthy business climate and to preserve and enhance the quality of life in Lafayette. The 2012 awardee is none other than Jay Lifson, the Chamber's Executive Director. "Jay took over the helm of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce in 2005 as the Executive Director and his leadership has been exceptional" says Steve Cortese, Chamber past president and board member. "Since 2005, the Cham-



Jay Lifson

ber's revenue has increased 65 percent and membership has increased 42 percent. This success has been vital in allowing the Chamber to continue its role of promoting business and enhancing the quality of life in our great City." Cortese points out that Lifson's involvement with the Chamber and the city goes way beyond expectations, "There are few Planning Commission or City Council meetings that Jay doesn't attend," says Cortese. "In the early morning hours you might not recognize the guy fixing the strand of twinkle lights on Mt. Diablo Blvd. that went out the night before, but that's also Jay. And if you're a business needing help with a governmental matter, or a government official needing assistance solving a particular problem for a business, it seems Jay is the one to call." The celebration for Lifson will be on Friday, January 20th at the Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa. Cocktails at 6:00 p.m. and dinner at 7:00 p.m. To register, please visit www.lafayettechamber.org.

News from the three Chambers of Commerce will be back next time.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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