

An Intellectual and Technological Odyssey from LeapPad to Smartpen and Beyond

Lafayette's Jim Marggraff empowers people

By Sophie Braccini



Jim Marggraff with an Odyssey interactive globe and a Smartpen
Photo Sophie Braccini

Like his red Tesla roaming the streets of Lafayette, Jim Marggraff is moving fast at the cutting edge of technology and intellectual challenge. The creator of the LeapPad and the Echo Smartpen could easily be mistaken for just an inventor, when in fact he is a humanist whose purpose is to empower his fellow human beings with technology.

If you ever meet Marggraff for a cup of coffee and a casual conversation, warm-up your neurons beforehand – his mind speeds along at a spectacular pace that could leave you breathless. When he talks about his passions and his business ventures,

the Lafayette businessman will blow you away with his ideas and achievements in the complex world of the transformation of waves and signals into creative applications that work like magic.

Fresh out of MIT, Marggraff already believed that one idea can change the world. While some of his classmates thought of business or military applications for the technology they were working on, his first impulse was to create tools for average people, that no one thought could ever work, let alone be a commercial success.

One of his first ventures was the Odyssey interactive globe. "I was struck by the fact that we are so igno-

rant about geography," he says, "so I created that tool, an atlas in the shape of a playful globe, storing millions of facts that are easily accessible by touching it." The globe compares populations and land areas between locations, it tells distances between points, it can calculate the length of geographic features such as rivers, and also contains cultural information. Removing the globe from its stand one is surprised to see that it is completely hollow: the information is transmitted wirelessly.

"The technology used for the globe is radio frequency that can pick up a touch with an accuracy of 1/8 of an inch where a non-conductive material like paper is tapped," says Marggraff, "so I thought, aha! we could take this and flatten it out and put a book on it and create an inexpensive tool to teach kids to read." That is how the LeapPad was invented. "At first people didn't get it," remembers Marggraff, "they said it would never work." Not surprisingly in hindsight, Leapfrog's doors opened and, with Marggraff on board, LeapPad became one of the most award-winning and successful toys of its time.

But Marggraff says he does not like on to hold on to his inventions past the first stages of commercialization. So he moved on to his next invention, the Smartpen. "I get my best ideas at 4:00 o'clock in the morning,"

says Marggraff who adds that he likes to go to bed with a problem – "I'll wake up at 4:00 with the solution."

He needed a tool to easily record his ideas, archive them and make them searchable. Those are some of the attributes of the Smartpen, a tool to free the imagination, as Marggraff puts it. "As people age they learn to prune their ideas, dismiss them as non-achievable," he says, "after a while, the creativity wanes." Marggraff says that people using a Smartpen testify that it changed their lives.

The pen allows one to record audio notes that are associated with any words or symbols written at the same time. Later the audio and written notes that were photographed by the pen can be transferred to a computer with a simple cable and searched on written terms. Notes can also be instantly shared over the internet, from the paper in a Wi-Fi environment, creating pencasts that can be shared in the cloud. The Smartpen is in fact a small computer, with a mini screen, a microphone, an high-speed infrared camera that captures 70 frames per second, a storage unit that holds up to eight gigabytes, and the special paper to write on can be bought or printed from one's computer.

Now that the Smartpen is a commercial success, Marggraff is ready to move on. He stepped down as CEO

on January 19, ready for a new adventure. "What I like is starting from nothing and making something happen," he says. That takes focus and confidence, as well as resilience. "I failed once with the first version of the globe," he says, "I lost all the money that family and friends had invested in it, but I came back with a better version."

Marggraff is not overly precise in describing what might come next from his own think-tank. "I have ideas on how to help people realize their full potential," he says. "Web technology today can connect people to their potential in profound ways. There is so much information that especially younger people provide about themselves that, properly arranged, could offer insights to enable them to do things they were unaware they could achieve. There are extraordinary opportunities in helping people realize their potential."

Maybe it's genetic—last year Marggraff's son, Blake, won first prize at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair with his partner, Matthew Feddersen, for a cancer treatment they worked on when they were both seniors at Acalanes High School. Stay tuned – Marggraff is a name you will surely hear again.

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

Just Say Yes!
61 Moraga Way, Suite 2
www.justsayyes.com



Photo provided

Just Say Yes Therapeutic Massage, an Indonesian-Influenced Studio.

After 11 years of bi-continental travel, practice and learning, especially in Thailand and Bali, Orinda certified massage therapist Kelly Greenwell has come back to stay. She opened a few weeks ago a

studio downtown Orinda, above Peet's Coffee & Tea. She brings to Orinda the techniques she learned and incorporated in her classic training, forming her own method that she adapts to the different needs of her clients. "I studied acupressure, reflexology, shiatsu, and I've come up with my own approach, blending what I've learned," she says, "I do not have a massage menu, I customize based on the conversation I have with my clients. Some come for the relaxation, others may come with a lower back problem, and I will approach them accordingly." She also offers Thai massage, which is a different modality all together. "Clients are clothed and we work on a mat on the floor," she explains, "I guide their movements, opening the joints and pressing with my hands or feet on the 'sen lines' (the Thai equivalent to the Chinese meridians)."

News from the three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

There is no stopping the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce in its growth. This month, the Chamber greeted its 650th member – Karan Dhillon, The Contractor's Coach, www.thecontractorscoach.com – Beware Walnut Creek, Lafayette is getting close!

Mind Your Manners

Manners That Mean Business – a class presented by etiquette consultant Shashi Dosaj, on Monday, January 30, from 10-11am in the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Conference Room. According to Dosaj, research shows that people who are successful and effective in their careers or business develop not only an expertise in their field, but an overall polish in appearance and behavior. They know how to greet others and make introductions, converse on many subjects, dine with dignity and treat people of all levels with respect. Learning traditional rules of etiquette and decorum in today's high-speed, high-tech world of business are more important today than ever before. Topics covered: Self-presentation, professional image and body language for a favorable first impression; Handshake and introductions; Business card etiquette; Networking etiquette for building successful business relationships; Communication Etiquette - telephone/speakerphone/cell phone/voicemail.

Monthly Mixer at Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School St. on February 8, 5:30-7pm

The first Big Band Ballroom Dance of 2012 will be held on Friday, February 3 at the Rheem Theatre in Moraga. Free dance lessons by Gail Enright, 7- 8pm, dancing to the music of The Big Band of Rossmoor from 8-10pm. Tickets are \$10 and are available at the Chamber office.

Moraga

The Chamber of Commerce and the Moraga Rotary Club, in an effort to promote and reward the spirit of customer service in Moraga, have established an "Employee of the Month" program that will reward a different worker every month with \$100 in gift cards (to be spent, of course, in Moraga). "Everyone can nominate their favorite server, cashier, attendant, etc.," says Kevin Reneau, a Rotarian, Chamber Board Member, and owner of Senior Helpers. "Supervisors and business owners can also nominate someone." The forms are available online at moraga.ca.us or at moragarotary.org. The nomination forms should be faxed to (925) 376-8002 where Reneau will collect them and distribute them to the committee of Rotary and Chamber members who will meet each month to make the selection. "There are some areas of emphasis on the form that will be criteria for the selection and there are guidelines for nomination which the committee will also utilize," says Reneau, who wants the process to be open. The criteria include competence, customer service and community service. The monthly winners will be entered in a pool from which will be selected the Employee of the Year.

Orinda

The Chamber's Orinda Country Club Luncheon is scheduled for Friday, February 24, noon to 1:30pm at the Orinda Country Club, 315 Camino Sobrante. The cost is \$30 per person. The luncheon's speaker will be award-winning weekend anchor for NBC Bay Area News, and Orinda resident, Diane Dwyer. Reserve your seat by calling 254-3909, or e-mail the Chamber at info@orindachamber.org.

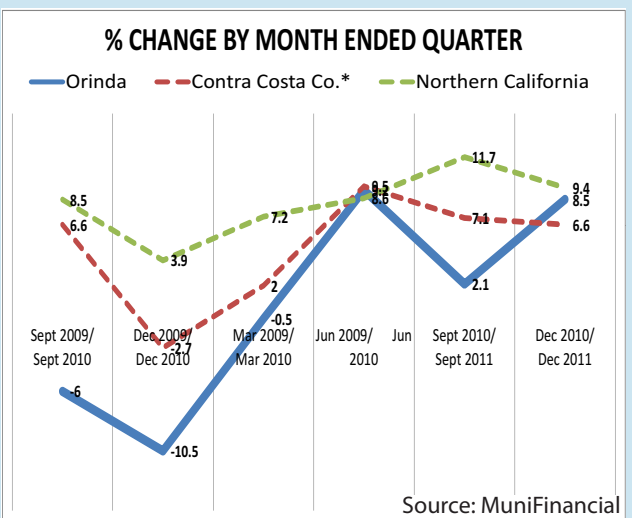
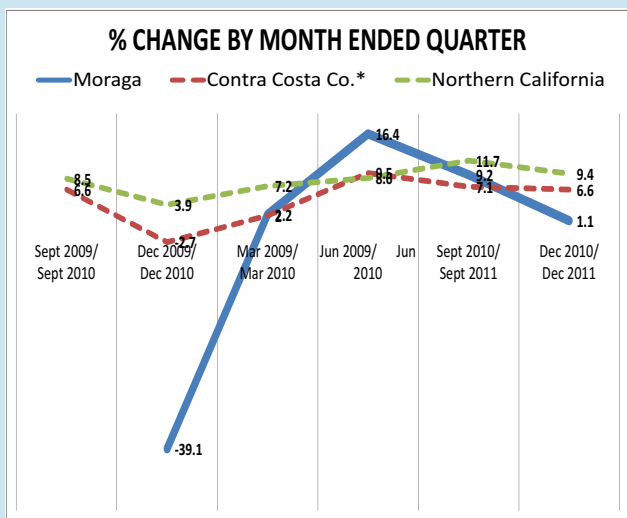
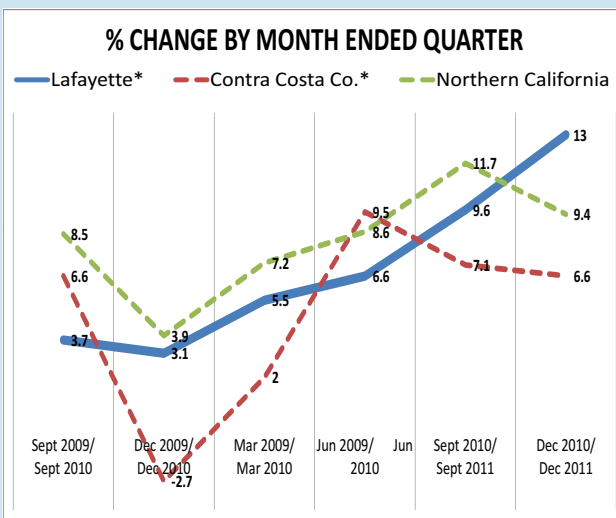
If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Local Sales Tax

From Shop Local campaigns to potential sales tax increases, the Lamorinda communities have a strong interest in increasing sales tax revenue. The charts below illustrate the last six quarters of sales tax activity in Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda, as well as Contra Costa County-wide and northern California. After each quarter ends, check our Business page for updated information.

FISCAL YEAR TO DATE (last 2 Quarters)

	Jul-11 thru Dec-11	\$ Chg	% Chg
Lafayette	\$1,253,398	\$126,847	11.3%
Moraga	\$481,461	\$23,730	5.2%
Orinda	\$444,726	\$21,861	5.2%
Contra Costa County	\$62,726,376	\$4,010,555	6.8%
Northern California	\$1,130,943,916	\$107,748,492	10.5%



Source: MuniFinancial