

Five Years of Restaurant Life in Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



Table 24 opened in September 2010
Photo Ohlen Alexander

The past five years have been quite tough for many retail businesses. Lamorinda, like the rest of the state and the country, has suffered the hardship of the recession.

Restaurants are often considered a good indicator of the state of a local retail climate, or as Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, said: "Restaurants are the engine that drives customers to our retail areas and helps it to prosper."

The 'restaurant scene' of the three

Lamorinda communities did show some positive signs over the past five years, with more diversity and general growth. Lafayette led the pack, with almost as many restaurants there as the two other cities combined.

According to Lifson, in spite of the recession, Lafayette has gained more restaurants than it has lost. "Some of our staple restaurants such as Postino, Chow, Pizza Antica, Metro, the Duck Club, Bo's Barbecue and Uncle Yu's are continuing to do very well," he said. "And most of those that opened recently are also meeting with great success."

Patxi Azpiroz and Bill Freeman opened their fifth Patxi's Pizza in Lafayette eight months ago.

"Our Lafayette restaurant is my favorite," Freeman said. "Our results have exceeded expectations. We focus on the quality of the food and on the customer service, and the local response has been excellent."

It's been a rockier road for the high-end French cuisine restaurant Chevalier that opened three and a half years ago. "We had two phenomenal months when we opened, but then the economy really hit and we had a very hard year and a half," said the young

French chef Philippe Chevalier. "But since last summer our business has been growing."

Chevalier believes that the economy might be doing better and that people have decided to enjoy life "no matter what." He has also built a very solid base of loyal customers.

"When people think of dining east of the tunnel, they think of Walnut Creek and Danville but they need to add Lafayette to the mix," said Lifson.

According to Moraga Chamber's Kathe Nelson the restaurant scene in her town has matured. Over the past five years, solid establishments such as Terzetto, Pennini's, Chef Chao and Amoroma continue to do well.

"The last five years have required a lot of creativity," said Terzetto's owner Roos Pal. "We accommodate the whole family, involve local artists, do a lot of catering and reach out to the Saint Mary's students."

Pal is in the process of opening a new Indian restaurant in the Rheem Shopping Center.

"We've offered Indian food at the farmers' market and had a great response," she said. She plans to open the new place by the end of May.

Another spot of diversity in Moraga was created one year ago by the Erez family with Shish Kabab Show. Mikkie Erez said he was glad they opened a restaurant where they live, in Moraga.

"Customers are coming back again and again," said the restaurant owner. "Some people come from as far as Marin County or Sacramento." He believes his success comes from fresh food "prepared with love," and of course the weekend music and dancing that add life and fun to the experience.

What Nelson says people in Moraga want now is a good sit-down Mexican restaurant and a sports bar. "But we need people to support their local restaurants," she said.

In between the brilliant successes in Lafayette and the under-the-radar successes in Moraga, Orinda is transforming itself.

Keith Miller, President of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce is very positive. "Orinda's staple restaurants such as Casa Orinda, Serika, Europa Hofbrau, Hsiangs, or Siam Orchid have been able to weather the economic storm," he said. And then there are shining stars. "Table 24 that

has been a smash success that has leveraged off Theater Square, added vibrancy to the ground floor, and benefited all the other restaurants there: Lava Pit, Shelby's, Bonfire Pizzeria."

In fact the business for restaurant owners Victor Ivry and Michael Karp has been so good that they are planning to open a second one in the same shopping center this spring.

"We've been open for 17 months, and we've been absolutely thrilled with the response of the community to the restaurant," Ivry said. "We wanted to provide the community with a place to gather and enjoy good, quality family food. We met a need and we've been rewarded. Now we think that there is a call for a fresh sit-down Mexican restaurant."

They plan to open Barbacoa in Theater Square by the end of May.

Karp and Ivry think that there is always room for good concepts that match the need of the community, and that grouping restaurants together can benefit everyone by increasing people's choices.

Miller says investors are believing in Orinda. "This is a good sign of recovery."

business briefs

Heaven Sent Eats and Treats Replaces the Orinda Deli 19 Orinda Way, Orinda

A few weeks ago Heaven Sent Eats and Treats moved into the space formerly occupied by the Orinda Deli. Owners Carole Heath and her niece Michelle Meyn make and sell "everything that grandma use to make." Along with their jams, jellies, pickles and fresh-baked goods, they continue to offer sandwiches like the Deli used to have, "just a tad more sophisticated," said Heath. The pair has been in business together for many years, opening the first drive-through coffee shop in Pleasanton, then a restaurant/bakery in San Diego. But since their children and grandchildren are here, they decided to come back to the East Bay. They chose Orinda because it's "a small community with sophistication." Since opening, they've had a very nice welcome from residents. "People come in, try our baked goods and come back for more," said Heath. They hope that the recently re-opened farmers' market two blocks from their store will bring in curious customers. Hours: 7 to 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

Hamlin Cleaners Goes "Green" 3516 Golden Gate Way, Lafayette

One of the things that sets Hamlin Cleaners apart - aside from the high-caliber service at its Lafayette shop - is the cheerful holiday decorations that adorn the shop counters and walls each month. St. Patrick's Day will be no exception. The current festive atmosphere includes a Guinness tap that delivers green beer, leprechauns, Irish angels atop green clovers, and rainbows galore. Owner Jeanne Hamlin, who began working in the dry cleaning business at age seven, ironing handkerchiefs with a steam iron at her parents' dry cleaning establishment on Clement Street in San Francisco's Richmond District, will be greeting customers every morning at 6 a.m. this month, her fingernails painted bright green. If you miss the whimsical St. Patrick's decorations this month, don't fret. You can always check out the bunnies, ducks and Easter motifs that are just around the corner.

Gryko Hardwood Flooring Gives Back to the Schools www.grykohardwoodflooring.com

Gryko Flooring is now donating 10 percent of its proceeds from any new job in the Lamorinda area to local schools. "We moved to Moraga in 2000 to provide our kids with the right environment which includes great, challenging schools," says Eva Gryko, the wife of business owner Jarek Gryko, "We came from a small community in Poland where everyone knew each other; Moraga has a similar feel. We want to support the sense of community and supporting our schools will do that. The idea of "it takes a village to raise a child" is very idealistic, but Lamorinda seems to be the right place to attempt it," Gryko said.

News from the three Chambers of Commerce Lafayette



A plaque commemorating 50 years of membership. Pictured (left to right): Matt Toth, Tim Walker, Jay Lifson, Stanley Pedder and Wally Hesselstine. Photo provided

• Pedder, Hesselstine, Walker & Toth, LLC celebrated 50 years of membership with the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce at the beginning of the month with a ribbon-cutting party. The law practice that boasts being the longest-serving law partnership in Contra Costa County, brings together a wealth of experience in a range of legal practice areas, with strengths in complex estate litigation and criminal defense. Collectively, the four attorneys have over 120 years of experience. They're located at 3445 Golden Gate Way, Lafayette. Phone: 925-297-6179, www.pedderlaw.com.

- Chamber Mixer at the Round Up Saloon, March 14, 5:30 to 7 p.m., 3553 Mt. Diablo Blvd.
- Social Media Workshop, March 21, 8 a.m., Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Social Media Coach Robin Fox teaches how to improve your online image. RSVP workshops@lafayettechamber.org.
- Celebration Dinner for 2012 Lafayette Citizen of the Year Gayle Uilkema, March 23, Lafayette Park Hotel. Contact the Chamber at 284-7404 for reservation details.

Moraga



Al Pyne (middle) first Moraga Employee of the Month, with Moraga Royale Executive Director Dianne Wilson, Moraga Rotary President Nola Avelar (left) and Moraga Chamber of Commerce Vice President Kevin Reneau (right). Photo Marissa Johnson

- Moraga Selects First Employee of the Month. The Moraga Rotary Club and the Moraga Chamber of Commerce named Al Pyne, who has served as the Director of Transportation for the Moraga Royale retirement community since 2004, as March's Moraga Employee of the Month. "Al always goes above and beyond the call of duty for our senior residents," said Moraga Royale executive director Dianne Wilson. "He is truly loved by our residents, their families and the entire staff." The Rotary and Chamber presented Pyne with a \$50 gift card to Safeway as well as a \$50 gift certificate to Pennini's in Moraga.
- Registration now open for the 6th Annual Moraga Community Faire (schedule for May 12). To register and reserve a booth, go to the Chamber's website: Moragachamber.com or contact Ellen Beans at ellen.beans@gmail.com. Businesses and individuals are invited to sponsor a colorful 96-inch banner that will hang on Moraga street light poles for three weeks before the Faire opens. Download the flyer online or contact Jane Russell at JaneRussell57@aol.com.

Orinda

- Ribbon Cutting for Visual Entree Optometry, March 30, 4 p.m., 2 Theatre Square # 114, Orinda.
- Save the date for the big April Mixer at Wilder on April 17, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. with cooking demonstration by Charles Vollmar Chef Instructor / Culinary Health Educator / Wellness and Lifestyle Consultant, Epicurean Exchange.

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

LeapFrog Plumbing



Going green takes more than luck - LeapFrog helps you make good decisions that make good green sense. **If you gotta go... go green!**

The one-call plumber Gas, Water & Sewer

- Emergency service
- Repairs & installation
- Video sewer inspection
- Copper re-piping
- Preventive checkups
- Design & remodeling
- Tankless water heaters

\$50 off Low-flush toilet installation*

+\$100 EBMUD rebate

\$200 off Noritz tankless or **\$89 off** standard tank water heater installation*

FREE ESTIMATES & CONSULTATIONS (They're always free!)

*1 coupon per service, exp. 4/15/12

We Hop To It!

Family-owned and serving Lamorinda since 1993

green solutions!



(925) **377-6600**

www.LeapFrogPlumbing.com

CA Lic 929641



Charlie Allison Sherzer & Associates

Charlie Allison Sherzer & Associates
346 Rheem Blvd. #201
Moraga, CA 94556
charlie@sherzer.com
CA Lic # 0814729

"Ask me about the AARP Auto Insurance Program from The Hartford."

Now available in your area!

This auto insurance is designed exclusively for AARP members - and is now available through your local Hartford independent agent!

Call Today for your **FREE, no-obligation quote:**

925-388-0335



The AARP Automobile Insurance Program from The Hartford is underwritten by Hartford Fire Insurance Company and its affiliates, One Hartford Place, Hartford CT 06155. CA license number 5152. In Washington, the Program is underwritten by Trumbull Insurance Company. AARP and its affiliates are not insurance agencies or carriers and do not employ or endorse insurance agents, brokers, representatives or advisors. This program is provided by The Hartford, not AARP or its affiliates. Paid endorsement. The Hartford pays a royalty fee to AARP for the use of AARP's intellectual property. These fees are used for the general purposes of AARP. AARP membership is required for Program eligibility in most states. Applicants are individually underwritten and some may not qualify. Specific features, credits, and discounts may vary and may not be available in all states in accordance with state filings and applicable law. The premiums quoted by an authorized agent for any Program policy include the additional costs associated with the advice and counsel that your authorized agent provides.