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## A Stroll Along Golden Gate Way - Something Old and Something New

By *Sophie Braccini*

There is a lot of history left in a certain part of Lafayette. From Plaza Way to Golden Gate Way, Lafayette offers a quirky and charming mix of older cottages, an abandoned theater, very industrial-looking businesses and of course the modern and magnificent library.

At the junction of Golden Gate Way and the Plaza, the old theater awaits its transformation into a new town hot spot, Fenton's Creamery and Restaurant. The property owners have promised to maintain the small town charm of the building. People on Golden Gate Way like their uniqueness and want to keep the small town feel as well.

Nobody could be happier about the coming of Fenton's than Mike Kearney, co-owner of the Henderson's Nut Factory at 3477 Golden Gate Way. Besides retail and gifts, a large portion of his business comes from creameries purchasing the roasted nuts they need for their recipes, and Fenton's is one of his oldest customers. "We love that they are coming into the theater," says Kearney. "It will be very good for everyone here." The Nut Factory was started by Stu Henderson in 1951. It changed ownership only once and present owner Mike Kearney succeeded his father in partnership with his brother Jeff. They continue the original tradition of buying nuts in the Central Valley (for the most part) and roasting them on the premises in small batches.

Kearney probably has one of the oldest businesses still operating on Golden Gate, though Stan Pedder of Pedder, Hesselstine, Walker & Toth, LLP (3445 Golden Gate Way) believes that he is the Way's true veteran. "I bought this building to establish my law practice 55 years ago," says the lawyer who has no intention of retiring anytime soon. Pedder has been a Lafayette resident since World War II and he still remembers when he and his friends played in the creek that's now behind his building and when Golden Gate Way was part of the main road going from Oakland to Walnut Creek. "Then the freeway was built and Mount Diablo Boulevard and the Way fell asleep," he says.

Not so, according to the owner of one of the newest kids on the block, Sewnow! (3534 Golden Gate Way). "We love, love, love being here," says enthusiastic owner Susan Goldie, who moved to Golden Gate Way a few months ago. "It was a great move; the students can walk safely here. We are located between the park and the library, and, additionally, for summer we can use the (Plaza) park for a picnic." Goldie says that her customers like the new space and that the influence on the business has been all good. She also talks about the synergy between the different inhabitants on the street, business owners and residents in apartment buildings.

"The other thing that's cool is the thrift shop (Nifty Thrift at # 3467) across the street where kids get inspiration working on vintage items, fabrics, or buttons." She adds that inhabitants of the senior residence close by are keeping them posted on arts and crafts shows they participate in. "We have a real sense of community."

Kearney also talks about the relationships between the businesses on the street and says his wife's favorite nail salon is just next door. Steve Benjamins, owner of Restoration Piano (3434 Golden Gate Way) who moved to Golden Gate four years ago, can't stop listing all the cross-business that happens on his new street. "The GNU Group next door made my sign, and when the Well Balanced Center needed a large place to host a party for their clients, they used my space," he says.

Benjamins is a Golden Gate Way enthusiast for many reasons. "Of my 37 years in business, the best three have been here," he says. When he first moved from the Berkeley area, he was not sure if his piano restoration and tuning business would thrive in a recession, but it did. "This street is eclectic, you find auto body stores, nail salons, residences, a language school (Viva El EspaSol), health and sports businesses, doctors, lawyers, computer people (EDC computer), but it has a special feel, off the beaten path that I like," he says. He appreciates that when a big truck pulls in front of his store and someone starts taking a piano away, residents across the street call to make sure it is legitimate. "I feel much safer than in Berkeley," he adds.

When the Lafayette Planning Department had a visioning session for the Golden Gate area, people said they wanted a pedestrian-friendly cultural and civic locale. With the elegant new library and new businesses coming in, and the remaining charm of old cottages like the Nifty Thrifty and continuing renovation projects, all the area needs to be pedestrian-friendly are . . . pedestrians!

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