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Neat Idea Turned into Local Global Business

By Sophie Braccini



Marylee Guinon holding a GlitzSee light.

Photo Sophie Braccini

You would never guess that Marylee Guinon needs help finding her lipstick or her keys at the bottom of her purse. The sporty Lafayette resident is an engineer, organized and in charge. But like many women, she carries a feminine purse that's almost a portable office.

"Our professional, personal and family lives are all in there, so, of course, it is quite full," she says. Being an engineer, and a practical one at that, Guinon wanted a better solution than having to dump the entire purse on a parking lot to find the keys that were hidden at the bottom. "There are flashlights for purses," she says, "but then you can't find it. I wanted to do a little something for women, to make our lives easier." That's how GlitzSee was designed: a small motion-activated light that would be bright enough to illuminate the inside of a purse, and look cute, too.

GlitzSee is the first product ever created and sold by Guinon. An environmental engineer by profession, she worked for years in Europe on the introduction of great sequoias in Nordic forests, became a creek restoration specialist back in the Bay Area, and is now an environmental

officer for the BART extension from Fremont to San Jose. She is also a practical woman who put herself through college buying non-working cars, repairing and reselling them. "In my family we learn to make things," she says, adding that her children, now college students, are the same. So she didn't shy away from taking an idea from start to finish.

"I probably wouldn't have done it without the help of my friend Larry Waide who knows how to manage production internationally," she adds.

Her first step was to create the device to specs, and finding those with electronic engineering skills to help. "My first enquiry was with the UC Berkeley Department of Engineering, but in spite of advertising my project and talking to professors I couldn't find anyone interested," she says with a tinge of regret in her voice. She also contacted a local engineering firm but their approach was not what she was looking for. "I like an iterative process, you try something, test it, modify and start again," she says. To find a team that would work with her rather than giving a finished product on the first run, she had to go overseas, to China. The result is a small unit that's motion-activated, but does

not react when it is swung.

"There were a lot of different aspects to decide, the size had to fit in the palm, the weight had to be light but with some substance, and the shape had to be attractive," she says. Guinon also worked with local focus groups of different ages. "What surprised me is that no one had an interest in adding the possibility of changing the battery," she says. But she wanted an object that would be very hard to open, since, in fact, the usage is quite diverse.

"I gave one to a Lafayette friend of mine and his granddaughter took it to play," she says. "She wanted it as a night light, and at some point he saw her trying to bite on it!" So Guinon forgot the reusability and has the little units sealed.

Once the design was finalized, production had to be organized. "We chose to produce in China for cost," she says. The first attempt looked too much like junk, so Guinon chose another company that also manufactures medical equipment. "The quality is much better," she says.

The last, but not least, aspect of the business Guinon had to learn was distribution. "The best way for us to distribute is through gift shops," says Guinon. The big trade shows are in Dallas and Atlanta. "When I went there it was a completely different experience," she adds. "In my other profession, I'm often the only woman in the room. At the trade shows, it's mostly women." In California, Guinon works with very successful groups of sales people.

GlitzSee took seven months to be conceived and has been on the market for a year. For now Guinon continues to operate the company from her garage and has hired one person to help with logistics. "We also sell on the Internet, but we have to be careful to price it at a level that does not compete with our shops' distribution network." In Lamorinda, GlitzSee can be purchased at Orchard Nursery.

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

Lamorinda Business Decorating Contest

It's not too late to join the Lamorinda 4th of July Business Decorating Contest!

Decorations go up on June 27 to July 5. Judging will be completed by June 30. Show your spirit and get a special ride in the Orinda 4th of July parade with the "Best Decorated Business Banner" including your business name. The winner will also get a free ad in the Orinda News and Lamorinda Weekly.

business briefs

A Dream Come True: Vintage-Antique Store Co-op and Do-It-Yourself Workshop
3391 Mt Diablo Blvd (next to Armand's Drapery), Lafayette
www.thebloomspace.com

"Last summer I went to a workshop in San Francisco about how to start your own business. I knew I wanted something vintage, something that included interior design and something cool," says business owner Kathy Burnett. After the workshop she rented booth space in two collectives, but when the owners decided to move, she took that opportunity to take the plunge and opened her own business. The Bloom Space started as a pop-up shop in Walnut Creek last April, but Burnett wanted more: a brick-and-mortar store with a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) workshop where people could explore their creativity. The space she found on Mt Diablo Blvd. has the rustic, quirky charm she was looking for and has enough square footage to accommodate the classes. "Our collective hosts 7-10 vendors of beautiful vintage and antique design: home and garden decor, furniture, artwork, vintage clothing and accessories, collectables, toys & funky, one-of-a-kind curiosities," says Burnett. The classes that she offers are crafts, decorating, repurposing, refinishing, and light culinary. "At our DIY classes you can 'Make It & Take It,' learn new techniques and have fun being creative," says Burnett. The Bloom Space Grand Opening party is July 27 but it is already open Tuesdays through Sundays.



Kathy Burnett Photo Sophie Braccini

eficiary, a local registered non-profit needs to apply online and fill out the provided form. The local Whole Foods team meets and selects the recipient. According to Shafer the store selects those non-profits whose mission best aligns with Whole Foods' objectives to support education, environment protection and a healthy lifestyle. The next business will be chosen in September/October. To apply, visit wholefoodsmarket.com/stores/lafayette/community-giving/.

Coldwell Banker Helps Habitat for Humanity



From left: Val Williamson, Jamie Roder, Dana Reedy, Attusa Valente, Tracey Fordahl, Katerina Sellis, Friend of CB Orinda (name unknown) Photo provided

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Community Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the residential real estate services company, raised \$121,315 for Habitat for Humanity in Northern California during the company's annual campaign. Some of the top fundraising Coldwell Banker offices in the East Bay region were the Orinda office at \$5,915, the Oakland-Piedmont office at \$5,287, and the Walnut Creek office at \$2,992. Donations stay in the communities in which they were raised and the net funds will assist local Habitat for Humanity chapters build homes in 2012. The donation was the result of a month-long community-wide raffle held throughout Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage's 62 Northern California offices. Entitled "Homes and Hope," this was the company's 13th annual fundraiser for Habitat for Humanity, the non-profit organization that helps low-income families build their own homes.

Bach Named One of Barron's 'Top 100 Women Financial Advisors'

The Bach Group

2 Theater Square, Suite #322, Orinda
Morgan Stanley Smith Barney announced today that Emily Bach, a wealth advisor in the firm's Orinda office, has been named to Barron's annual list of America's Top 100 Women Fi-

nancial Advisors. The "Barron's Top 100 Women Financial Advisors" is a select group of individuals who are screened on a number of criteria. Among the factors the survey takes into consideration are the volume of assets overseen by the financial advisor, revenue produced for the firm and quality of service provided to clients. Investment performance is not an explicit criterion.

News from the three Chambers of Commerce Lafayette

Entrepreneurs Club meets at 8:30 a.m. Thursday, June 21 at Farmyard Darlings, 3925 Mt. Diablo Boulevard, at Mt. Diablo Nursery. Kim Berry and Carole Sinclair will share their story about what led to a very successful business.

Next in the Summer Series June 22, Square Dance with a professional caller. This summer, there's free fun happening every Friday night from June 15 through August 24 in downtown Lafayette's Plaza Park (Mt. Diablo Blvd. & Moraga Rd.). Every Friday is different. Fun for all ages. For complete event listing, visit: www.trylafayettefirst.org/summer-2012-events/.

Moraga

Chamber Mixer from 6 to 8 p.m. June 26 at the Career Wisdom Institute, 1036 Country Club Drive, Suite 100. Come celebrate with Sherry Berman and Julie Gleeson the launch of their new book: "Inside Job - 8 Secrets to Loving Your Work and Thriving."

Orinda

4th of July Events - Help Needed!

Orinda Chamber's legendry Hot Dog Booth will start this year at 10 a.m. on July 4. The Orinda Chamber sells between 700 and 1,000 hot dogs in about three hours that day, so it takes a lot of volunteers to make it happen. "We have always been grateful for the help from Scouts, who have again volunteered to help this year," says Chamber Executive Director Candy Kattenburg. "Scouts will be wrapping up hot dogs, and will be grabbing sodas, chips, and candy and passing them off to the adult volunteers who are manning the cash boxes." This project requires older Scouts (eighth-grade and older). If you know a Scout who might be interested, please contact Steve Sernett at sernettmail@gmail.com.

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