

# Back to the Table

By Sophie Braccini



Instructor Liza Scaff works in the kitchen with Leslie Pease and Lisa Evaristo (right)

Photo Sophie Braccini

It's a sweet deal, two local sisters going back to the kitchen together and inviting the community along. Leslie Pease and Lisa Evaristo have just started "Back to the Table" in Lafayette. A new business that offers culinary classes of all types and for all ages on the first floor, while upstairs a production kitchen that can be rented by local business

owners who sell their food products – and all that in downtown Lafayette, in a quaint little cottage on Lafayette Circle, next to Queen Bee.

"The idea came to us during a trip to Italy where we took a cooking class as a family," remembers Evaristo. "That's where the concept came together for us. The class started at the market

where we bought what was available and fresh that day, then choosing recipes and putting the whole dinner together, while learning useful techniques along the way. We had never experienced a class that was applicable to everyday life, uncomplicated yet making great food," adds her older sister.

The two women, standing in their newly opened business, finish each other's sentences. They are on the same wave-length, animated by the same energy and desire to bring something unique to the community.

When they put their business plan together, the plan was to combine the cooking school with

an upstairs kitchen for the Lafayette School District. "I worked with the Burton Valley lunch program for years," says Evaristo. "At first, our project was to provide the Lafayette School District with a place to cook all of the lunches."

"But it ended up not being big enough," adds Pease, "so we changed orientation and decided to make the upstairs a production kitchen."

The upper floor can accommodate four cooks working at the same time. It is outfitted with all of the professional equipment required in a facility that produces large quantities, and it is fully up to code with the Sanitary District. "The requirements are very stringent," says Pease. "It took us a year to complete the whole space." Large cold rooms are available for clients to store their ingredients. "The cost is \$20 to \$30 an hour and people can work here 24 hours a day, seven days a week," says Pease.

The feel of the downstairs is completely different. Although the ovens are professional grade, everything has a homey feel. The island is obviously larger than what would be found in an average home, but the style and the colors make everything inviting. "When the class starts, people will sit around the big wood table and meet one another," says Evaristo, "then they'll move around the island where each will have a spot to start working." In the end, the participants will gather around the table and share their meal together.

A diverse collection of classes are available. Some include entire menus, such as An Evening in Tuscany or the Barbecue Menu; some are about techniques, like the pie class, preserves and canning or basic culinary skills; others cater to the younger crowd like Cooking it Up in College; Dim Sum and Sushi are a few examples of cooking from around the world; and a class like Cooking for the Whole Family helps plan healthy menus that will appeal to the young and old. "We will also have Sunday classes that will start at the Farmers Market," adds Evaristo, "to open people up to what's available and what can be done."

On the website, the calendar is full of classes offered through the end of the September. While not sold out yet, some are already "almost full," like the baby food class. "We were lucky to have great cooks and chefs contact us to teach in our new school," says Pease. The biography of some of the teachers is quite impressive: some are chefs and have owned restaurants; all have extensive teaching experience and share a passion for food with Evaristo and Pease.

It's a real family business. Pease and Evaristo's mother comes by to check on her daughters' new business, and sometimes Evaristo's younger daughter comes to help.

For more information, visit [backtothetablecookingschool.com](http://backtothetablecookingschool.com).

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

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## business briefs

**ISushi Replaces Tao Restaurant**  
960 Moraga Rd., Lafayette  
(925) 299-2882



Michael Wu ready to eat a plate of Sushi prepared by his new chef  
Photo Sophie Braccini

Michael Wu who took over the burger joint next to Chevalier in Lafayette made the first transformation when creating Tao Restaurant that served Japanese and American food, burgers and ramen. "That was a little confusing for our customers," says the young owner, "so we decided to make this place completely Japanese." Now, it is totally transformed. "And we've added a Sushi Bar," he says. Wu knows that there is competition in Lafayette so he wanted to do something special. "We have selected four different fish suppliers and we ask them to deliver every day," he says. "We want to serve the best quality fish." He's decided to also keep his prices competitive and the portions generous. "I have to build my clientele," he says with a broad smile. Wu came to America seven years ago from Hong Kong. "Hong Kong is the best place in Asia to eat," he says with a tinge of nostalgia in his voice. "There you find the best Chinese and the best Japanese food, and it is vibrant 24/7." So why come to quiet Lafayette? "I knew I had to leave when I decided to have a family," he says. "My family said California was the best place, and since I came here, I knew that Lamorinda was where I wanted to raise my children." Last year, he moved to Lafayette with his wife and two small kids; the oldest will be in first grade this fall. "We are here to stay and become part of this community," he says.

**Restructuring and Name Change for Sixto's Hair Design**  
386 Park St., Moraga  
(925) 376-4544

Martha Estrada wants to thank her clients for their

support and to inform them that she changed the name of her salon to Unisex Hair Design. Martha will continue to work next to the Rheem Theatre, and she is in the process of recruiting new people to work with her.

## News from the three Chambers of Commerce

### Lafayette

The Chamber supports the movies: Movies in the Plaza at 8 p.m. on Friday nights: The Muppets on Friday, July 20; Iron Man on Friday, July 27.

### Moraga

Chamber of Commerce Golf Tournament. The First Annual Moraga Chamber of Commerce Golf Tournament promises to be a great day of golf and a great evening of fun and prizes Monday, July 23 with check-in at 10:30 a.m., shotgun start at noon at the Moraga Country Club. The \$150 entry fee includes golf, refreshments, prizes and an after-party. If golf isn't your game, but you don't want to miss the fun, just come to the after-party for a \$50 fee. For full registration details, visit [moragachamber.org](http://moragachamber.org) or contact Kathe Nelson at [Kathe@moragachamber.com](mailto:Kathe@moragachamber.com).

### Orinda

Cal Shakes "After Hours Tour and Wine" event. The Orinda Chamber invites its members and friends to California Shakespeare Theater's scenic Bruns Amphitheater in Orinda from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m. July 26 for a casual wine-and-cheese hour outdoors in one of the eucalyptus-shaded picnic groves. Join current Cal Shakes corporate partners Pat O'Dea (CEO, Peet's Coffee), Marshall Kido (Preferred Banking Segment Manager, City National Bank), and Victor Ivry (Owner, Table 24 and Barbacoa restaurants) to learn how and why their organizations partner with Cal Shakes, and get insight into the ways that partnering with this nationally-renowned theater can strengthen your business. Although this event is free, each guest needs a grounds pass to enter the Bruns. Guests of this event are also eligible to purchase half-price tickets to Cal Shakes' 7:30 p.m. performance of Spunk that evening. When you RSVP, please indicate if you would like to stay for the show. For reservations, contact Darcy Brown-Martin at [dbrown-martin@calshakes.org](mailto:dbrown-martin@calshakes.org) or (510) 548-3422 ext. 141 by July 23.

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