

Rheem's Revival

By Sophie Braccini



Over 100 people gathered at Tangelo for last Sunday's ribbon-cutting.

Photo Andy Scheck

Not so long ago, the Rheem Shopping Center in Moraga emitted a bleak atmosphere with many empty store fronts, and no pedestrian traffic. The vibe today has changed. It's not yet Mount Diablo Boulevard, but especially around lunch time and in the afternoon, the still old-looking Center seems to come back to life with kids happily running around, customers eating at tables outside, and talking to each other along the walkways. It's taken only a few new retail establishments for the upbeat mood to

gel, with some hard work on their parts.

Customers from Moraga and beyond responded very well to the transformation of Lamorinda Pizza and to the opening of Shish Kabbab Show, both owned by Moraga residents. They also gave an immediate warm welcome to two new places also owned by residents: New Delhi Bistro and Tangelo Premium Frozen Yogurt.

New Delhi opened at the beginning of July under the ownership of Roos Pal, owner of Terzetto, and a

long-time Moraga resident and native of India. "To me this is comfort food," said Pal. She takes great pleasure experimenting with local ingredients to recreate the food she loves.

The restaurant has been bustling since the day it opened. It took nine months of permit-seeking and work to get the doors to New Delhi open. "I was expecting six months," said Pal who still had to pay rent to the owner, Kimco Properties. Working with the Sanitation District was particularly difficult for her; she says the

Town was easy to deal with.

On the other side of the Center, close to the Pet Shoppe and Capa Dance Studio, May Lo, who just opened the frozen yogurt parlor Tangelo, had a different experience. "I am an architect, so I reviewed my plans with the Sanitation District beforehand and was able to accommodate their modifications quickly," she explained. Her experience with the Town was not as positive. "They were unusually demanding," she says, adding that it contradicts the official discourse of being business-friendly.

It took the young mother of three school-age children 6 months to open her store. But it was an immediate hit. As soon as school is dismissed, waves of young kids with their parents in tow flood the place.

It is brightly decorated by Lo herself who wanted to provide the best frozen yogurt in the area and the best customer experience. She selected a company in Arkansas and one in the Pacific Northwest to provide the frozen yogurt. "I visited the company in Arkansas and was very impressed with their process and the quality of the natural ingredients that they use for flavoring," she said. Her children were her first customers and helped choose the providers, the flavors and toppings. "We will keep eight favorite flavors all the time and will rotate two more flavors," said Lo who listens to her clients and also provides sorbets as a non-dairy op-

tion.

Both women rely on community marketing to develop their businesses. As a veteran of the restaurant business, Pal has already created a reputation for herself by her hard work and service to the community. Lo is well connected with the schools, will support their fundraisers and provides PTAs with meeting space.

They have also started to create productive links with other businesses inside the Rheem Shopping Center. "I buy a lot of my fresh vegetables at the produce market that recently opened here," said Pal who claims to do everything from scratch. She also bought many decorating items for her restaurant at Home Goods. "I've started to talk to John (McGrath - Lamorinda Pizza) and Mikki (Erez - Shish Kabbab Show) about doing entertaining events together," said Lo. The three retail shops overlook a charming patio where Lo can picture a local jazz group performing.

Lo held her ribbon cutting party on Sunday, September 9; it was a great success with free yogurt and T-shirts, music and lots of excitement. Pal's ribbon cutting party will be September 15 starting at 11 a.m. with Bollywood music and dancers, appetizers and drinks.

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

New Baby and Kids' Store
3535 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette
www.tulip-lafayette.com

Last month in La Fiesta Square, Lafayette resident Jen Frick opened a new retail store, Tulip, for babies and kids (where the Red Wagon - also a children's clothing store - was located). The store carries clothes for newborns to age eight, diaper bags, swaddle blankets, toys, strollers, bedding and more. It is also an education and resource center for expectant and new parents, offering classes, support

groups and advice clinics. Frick says she researched every item in her collection to provide only the best, making sure it also works well and is age appropriate. The store located is open every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

New Casual Dress Store for Men
3571 Mount Diablo Blvd., Lafayette
venturemensgoods.com

Venture Men's Goods opened on September 8 with a clear mission to bring west coast casual elegance to the

doorstep of Lamorinda men. Rosylyn and Tom Stenzel chose a range of California-designed and California-made casual clothes for men. The focus of the shop is well-crafted fashions for men of all ages who have a sense of their own style. Favoring west coast casual, the Stenzels offer tops and bottoms including jeans, as well as jackets, shoes, and belts.

Matthew Poirier Named Moraga Employee of the Month

Pennini's popular food service manager, Matthew Poirier, has been named the Moraga Employee of the Month for August. Poirier is the sixth recipient of the monthly employee award, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Moraga and the Chamber of Commerce, and has worked at Pennini's for the past six years. He manages a staff of 12 food servers and is well known for his cheerful approach and his ability to relate to the wide variety of customers, from new Saint Mary's students to customers who have been coming to the restaurant for well over a decade. "Matthew has a genuine commitment to make sure our customers receive quality food and service," said Pennini's owner Patrick Vahey. "He is a real team player and has played a major role in our outreach to the Saint Mary's student body. Our customers really think highly of him and I view him as my right hand man." In winning the award, the Rotary and Chamber will award Poirier a \$50 gift card to Safeway as well as a \$50 gift certificate to Ace Hardware in Moraga.



From left, Pennini's owner Patrick Vahey, Employee of the Month Matthew Poirier, Rotary President Frank May and Moraga Chamber of Commerce President Frank Melon.

Photo provided

East Bay Small Business Symposium

The East Bay Small Business Initiative will present a symposium September 18 to support small business owners, from start-ups to mature companies, as they grow and move their businesses to the next level. Topics will include Business Growth Tools, B-to-B Networking, and Strategic Resources. Small business resource providers in financing, marketing, planning, employee recruitment and training will be present. Featured speaker Ed Baxter of Baxter Media will talk about "Finding Your Story." Registration starts at 7:30 a.m. with the three-hour program beginning at 8 a.m. at the Veterans Memorial Building, 400 Hartz Avenue in Danville. For reservations and more info, visit www.ebsmallbusiness.com. No charge for small business attendees.

Ribbon Cutting at Itrium Thursday, September 20 at 5 p.m., 973 Moraga Road.

Social Media Strategies Workshop Series by Robin Fox. Learn about Personal Branding in a LinkedIn World Wednesday, September 19 starting at 8 a.m. in the Lafayette Library Art and Science Classroom. Online registration at bit.ly/LafayetteChamber. Free for Moraga and Lafayette Chamber members.

Moraga

Chamber regular members meeting Friday, September 28 at the Hacienda de las Flores starting at 7:30 a.m. with coffee and muffins, and followed by a discussion from 8 to 9 a.m. about the issues that will be on the November ballot and might impact business owners.

Orinda

The Fifth Annual Orinda Restaurant Tour will be held from 5 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, September 18, conducted by the Orinda Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Educational Foundation of Orinda (EFO) in the Theatre District of downtown Orinda. Each restaurant and winery on the tour will provide a small portion that best represents their establishment at no additional cost to event ticket holders. Advanced tickets: \$40; \$45 for tickets purchased at the door. Attendees will also enjoy art (30 artists will display their work), live music, free massage, valet parking and more. Visit Orindachamber.org for more details and purchase tickets.

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News from the three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette
Ribbon cutting at 5 p.m. September 13 for the new office grand opening of Pacific Union Real Estate, 201 Lafayette Circle #100.

The 17th Annual Lafayette Art and Wine Festival (with music, too) will take over Downtown Lafayette on Saturday and Sunday, September 15 and 16. There is still time to volunteer and have fun with your fellow Chamber members and neighbors. Contact the Chamber.

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