

Published September 12th, 2012

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 option.

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.

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Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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