

# The Writing Studio

By Sophie Braccini

Writing well requires thinking well, and can lead to overall success in school and in life. The essay, for example, is an important aspect of college admissions, yet while Lamorinda communities thrive on excellence and have many private specialized schools for math, none are dedicated to writing – until now. On Oct. 28, Shoshana Mark opened The Writing Studio at 3455 Golden Gate Way in Lafayette. The writing school trains third- to 12th-grade children, emphasizing creativity for its younger students, critical reasoning for older kids.

Mark is a former English teacher from New York who went on to different writing-related jobs before moving with her family to Lafayette 10 years ago. While raising her two children, she worked as

a writing instructor for Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation – now Lafayette Partners in Education – for many years. “We have wonderful teachers here, but teaching one-on-one is impossible for them, and some kids fall through the cracks,” says Mark, adding that over all her years working for LASF she was saddened to see so many kids who were not proficient writers.

Now that her own children are older, she decided to open her own studio. “I love teaching kids of all ages,” she says. “With the younger ones, we’ll learn to use our five senses and to allow them to become natural writers, connecting with their own voice.” She believes that elementary school years are the time for creativity and narrative writing, while middle and high school students should focus on ex-

pository essays.

“As students mature,” she says, “organizing their thoughts before even starting to write becomes crucial.” Mark describes the essay as a funnel: the introductory paragraph starts wide, narrowing as writers become more specific, leading toward their thesis statement.

Mark groups students by age and works with them twice a week. “The first session, the children come in and I tell them that this will be the only time they’ll hear the sound of my voice,” she says. “After that, every interaction, even the most trivial one, will be done in writing. This becomes my mantra, and this is how they connect with themselves; they do not speak, they write.”

The students come back to work with Mark one-on-one a few



Shoshana Mark in front of The Writing Studio

Photo Sophie Braccini

days after the group lesson. “I do not give homework; I want to see the process, and we go over every word, every paragraph. That’s how they learn.”

Cost for a 10-week session (two

days a week) is \$375. For information, call (925) 385-0211.

*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

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

**Holiday Open House at Venture**  
3571 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette  
(925) 385-0259

Venture Men’s Goods of Lafayette is getting ready for its Holiday Open House on Thursday, Nov. 29. “We’ll have the founders from Taylor Stitch shirtmakers of SF, wine from Rock Creek Vineyards, appetizers from Postino, and paintings from local artist Tom Matousek,” says co-owner Roslyn Stenzel. Venture is also participating in the holiday warm clothing drive organized in partnership with DoGood Vines and Town Hall Theatre (see story on page B8).

**Yan’s Restaurant Opens in Orinda**  
1 Orinda Way  
(925) 253-9852

You remember when Yan’s Restaurant closed in Lafayette? While Susan Yan had two other restaurants that were also started by her parents in Walnut Creek and Alamo, she could not leave Lamorinda. A few weeks ago, Yan’s re-opened, this time in Orinda, at 1 Orinda Way. Yan promises the same high-quality cooking that made the Lafayette restaurant so popular. Her dad still cooks using his own recipes. For more information, visit [www.yansrestaurant.com](http://www.yansrestaurant.com).

**G.J. Gardner Homes Opens in Lafayette**  
3704 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Suite 312  
[www.gjgardner.com](http://www.gjgardner.com)

One of California’s largest custom home builders, G.J. Gardner Homes, will open a new franchise in Lafayette owned by father-son team and Lafayette residents Lance and Jordan Engeldinger. “I’ve been both a long-time resident of Lafayette and a veteran of the construction industry. I’m honored to be a part of the G.J. Gardner team,” said Lance Engeldinger. “And, most importantly, I’m excited to be working alongside my son in an industry that we both share a passion for.” The company offers clients the ability to design and build a new custom home at affordable prices; it also works with several banks that offer both land and home/land financing. G.J. Gardner Homes has been operating worldwide for over 25 years. Each G.J. Gardner Homes office is owned and operated by local licensed custom homebuilders.

**News from the three Chambers of Commerce**

**Lafayette**

Annual Holiday Mixer from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 12 at Wells Fargo Bank 3630 Mt. Diablo Blvd. Admission: \$10,

or free with a donation of three canned food items.

Ribbon cutting for Lan’s Skin Care at 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 6, 3416 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

**Moraga**

Holiday Party sponsored by Mechanics Bank from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 6 at the Moraga Country Club. “There will be dancing, countless appetizers and wine,” says Chamber administrator Kathe Nelson. Cost: \$10 per person. Reservations required by Friday, Nov. 30 to [kathe@moragachamber.org](mailto:kathe@moragachamber.org). Optional: Please bring a new, unwrapped toy for donation to Toys for Tots.

**Orinda**

Hospice Tree Lighting ceremony at 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 1, 31 Orinda Way, in the Bank of America parking lot. Every year, the Chamber and Hospice of the East Bay bring local school choirs and Santa together to welcome the holidays.

Holiday Party at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 6 at Mechanics Bank, 77 Moraga Way. All are welcome and encouraged to bring guests interested in joining the Chamber. For info, visit [www.orindachamber.org](http://www.orindachamber.org).

## Lynn’s Top Five

# Creating Family Memories and Charitable Giving: The Perfect Holiday Recipe

By Lynn Ballou, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™

At this time of year we are all looking for ways to spend time with friends and families and celebrate the holidays without taking our budgets to the brink. Folks in our community are particularly charitably minded, so I really think this column will resonate well with all of you. In fact, I wish you were here with me as

I’m writing this, because I bet you have a whole bunch of other great ideas I didn’t list!

But just to get the conversation and creative juices going, here are five ideas for how to spend quality time with your loved ones, add value to things that matter to you at this time of year, create a lifetime of wonderful

memories, and, oh yeah – not break the piggy bank!

**1) Give to someone’s favorite charity in their name.** My brother and I had been sending each other assorted muffins, cheeses and the like for years. By the time we were done with the packaging, the shipping and the sales tax, we’d each spent a lot of

money for a little gift. Finally we said “enough!” Now what we do has so much more meaning to us both: we gift to our favorite charities during the holidays in each other’s honor. It took us both being brave enough to be the one to say, hey, do you really want another cheese roll this year? Or can I find a better way to honor you? My brother, despite being the “foodie” that he is, immediately embraced the charitable gifting idea, leaving me to wonder, what took me so long to ask him?

**2) Volunteer together.** For those of you blessed to live close to family, I personally love this idea. Working together on behalf of your favorite organization builds a lifetime of memories and really leaves a lasting legacy. Whether it’s volunteering to serve a meal at a shelter, or singing carols at a nursing home, you’ll never forget the event and the time you spent together, all the while doing something truly wonderful for someone else.

**3) Collect coats or canned goods at your party.** Another personal favorite, I love being invited to someone’s home with the “hostess gift” being a donation for a worthy cause. From coats, to canned goods, to spare change in your pocket, many great ideas resonate well with your guests. One friend tells me that she often says “yes” to parties she might otherwise not go to just to be able to bring a donation hostess gift!

**4) Take your grandkids (or children!) shopping for a Toys for Tots present.** This always puts a smile on my face. I loved doing this with my family, and it was so great to see my kids learn to buy something for someone less fortunate than themselves. This is especially meaningful for grandparents to do with their grandchildren. So, after they sit in Santa’s lap or you hit the movie theater, take your children or grandchildren to a toy store and pick up some gifts for less fortunate kids. Then deliver them to

the fire station or other drop-off location with your children or grandchildren. This doesn’t have to be expensive! Give them a budget and let them enjoy shopping for someone in need. They’ll remember for years both spending this great time with you and how good it made them feel to do something for someone else.

**5) Clean out the house and give it away!** Make it a scavenger hunt in reverse: challenge each family member to find three things they never use that someone else might enjoy. It could be the obvious clothing or toys, or it could be dishes you don’t use anymore or even excess office supplies! Books and magazines can be donated to our libraries while other goods can be given to our local Goodwill, Salvation Army and drop boxes at some local churches. Less clutter and a memorable charitable family event? A win-win!

Wishing you all a memorable, charitable and meaningful holiday season! Cheers!

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