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IN POINT RICHMOND

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FOR NEW STUDENTS: MAR. 26
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Moraga's Own Hot Dog King

By Diane Claytor



Stanley Roth with his first pretzel cart.

Photos provided

Moraga resident Stanley Roth knows hot dogs. And mustard, relish, sausage and sauerkraut. This year, Roth's business, Stanley's Steamers, is celebrating its 40th anniversary and if you're in San Francisco you're bound to see at least one of his 11 familiar and popular hot dog carts. Yet this business, as did Roth's other entrepreneurial ventures, began as somewhat of a fluke.

As a U.C. Berkeley student in 1974, Roth saw someone selling pretzels on campus. He took that idea and ran with it: he began selling pretzels out of a cardboard box at the cable car turnaround in San Francisco. As business grew, Roth built a small cart. When authorities told him no food permits were available, he got creative, selling the pretzels as "Baked Sculptures of Flour and Water" under the street artist ordinance. In 1982, Roth added hot dogs to the menu and built the first hot dog cart approved in California.

In the meantime, another opportunity presented itself – another "being in the right place at the right time" moment. A visit to the recently-opened Exploratorium with a hungry child in tow revealed that the museum had no food service, only vending machines. Roth found the appropriate person, asked why there was no food and, when told the facility didn't have water, he offered to provide a mobile café and bring the water with him. For 15 years, Roth operated the "always busy" 80-seat Angels Café, providing fresh sandwiches, salads, pastries, and espresso. And every day, Roth's company carted water in and every evening, the wastewater was carted out.

And all this time, Stanley's Steamers, once described by the San Francisco Chronicle as an "urban delicacy," was still successfully selling hot dogs around San Francisco's heavily populated areas.

The Exploratorium lease expired in 1996. Roth, with luck and again, hungry children, found his next project. And this one was much closer to home.

Sitting at the old Moraga Coffee Shop while his two children enjoyed their ice cream, Roth looked around, thinking, "this is an amazing loca-

tion." He gave his card to the waitress, telling her, "If the owners are ever interested in selling, have them give me a call." Within minutes, the owner appeared, offering to sell the restaurant on the spot. Together, they walked to the title company and opened an escrow account. Then Roth went home to tell his wife, Heather, about his latest idea.

The restaurant was gutted and rebuilt; his wife designed the interior, and together they chose the name Café Terzetto. "We wanted it to be chic, but casual, with excellent food," Roth said. Just as Café Terzetto was opening, Lafayette's popular Tourelle Restaurant abruptly closed. Never one to miss an opportunity, Roth, knowing many talented people would now be unemployed, stood outside the Lafayette restaurant and, as staff arrived to get their final paycheck, handed them an application.

"Heather took a leave from her teaching position at Contra Costa College, I sublet my carts and for more than three years, we ran a very busy, very successful restaurant,"

Roth stated. On a good weekend, they served 200-250 dinners and up to 400 Sunday brunches.

This success caught the attention of an Orinda restaurant owner who had just lost his lease. "He called me to say he wanted to buy my restaurant. We weren't thinking of selling, but realizing this was a great opportunity, we came up with an offer which was accepted a week later," Roth said. "We took a long family vacation, Heather returned to teaching and I returned to my carts."

Roth had no food service training when he began what he describes as a "great ride."

"You learn, you research," he said. "Just about anything is available to you if you read all about it. I've always said you don't have to be the smartest person; it's the person that keeps persevering that wins."

Roth realized early on that being an entrepreneur fits his personality. "I don't like rules or boundaries," he admitted. And he loves what he does, saying that there are times he just looks at it all and "is amazed at how much fun I'm having. I'm reenergized every day."

The Roths moved to Moraga's Sanders Ranch when it first opened in 1985. They immediately became involved in the community, with Roth serving as president of the homeowners association. He's again actively involved with the association as it works on a long-term creek management plan.

With three children who went through the Moraga schools, Roth has also served as a Boy Scout leader, softball coach and parent advisor.

Roth acknowledges that he occasionally thinks about retirement. "I heard someone once say that in your first 30 years, you learn what you need to know; during the next 30 years you do what you're good at and the rest of your life you do what you love. I'm still loving it all."



Roth with his daughter, Vanessa.