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## Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe Follows New Trends

By Sophie Braccini



Jennifer Lenfestey in the Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe Photo Sophie Braccini

It's been just over a year since Jennifer Lenfestey, a former employee, took over the Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe. The store, tucked in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center, could have continued to survive doing business as usual, but Lenfestey has given it new life by focusing on suburban pet trends like supplying chicken and horse feed, delivering hay and organic dog food, stocking cat furniture, and even finding homes for rescue rabbits.

A Camino Pablo Elementary, Joaquin Moraga Intermediate and Campolindo High School grad, Lenfestey is not new to Moraga. She returned to Moraga in 1992 after serving in the Coast Guard, where she was a master helmsman, and surveyed icebergs as part of the Ice Patrol. "This unit dates back to the post-Titanic era," she explains. "It was very interesting to map icebergs and predict their routes." After leaving the Coast Guard, she decided to find a job.

"I did all kinds of odd jobs," she remembers with a smile. "At the time I had a pet corn snake and was looking for live mice to feed it. I looked all over until I opened the door of the Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe." She found out that the store had the supplies she needed and that they were also looking for help. "That was 18 years ago; I have not left since," she says.

Lenfestey says she loves the atmosphere of the store, the customers, and the pets. "For me it was a stress-free job," says the business owner who likes a quiet life, "and when Jorge (Quintero) decided to sell the store, I thought that the best way for me to keep my job was to buy the business."

The congenial woman has been thriving as a business owner; she does not count her hours, but never feels overworked. She likes all aspects of being an owner, especially being her own boss and making the decisions she finds appropriate for the shop.

"Over the years the demand from customers has changed," she says. "People do not buy rats anymore, for example, and we've seen a great diversification in what people are looking for." She has seen the demand for specific non-GMO or organic pet food increase, and a growing number of people with suburban farm animals such as chickens ask for feed and accessories.

"The store's new policy is that if people want something we do not have, we will get it for them," says Lenfestey. "And if they want something bulky or in large quantity, we will deliver."

Chloe Gilmore, who's been working at the store for a few years, loves the atmosphere of the place. "It is very nice to work here," she says. "We are continuing to offer the middle school internship at the Canyon School and students in sixth to eighth grade come and spend time with us learning everything from cleaning cages to ordering products or holding the register."

Cleanliness is very high on Lenfestey's list. One of the first things she did when she bought the store was to freshen it up, deep clean it, repaint and reorganize. She also called back longtime former manager of the store, Carolyn Green, to help. Green, who is heavily involved with the East Bay Rabbit Rescue, agreed to come back. The rabbits in the store are rescue pets in need of a good home.

"We continue to have guinea pigs that are wonderful as a first pets," says Lenfestey. "We also have aquarium and pond fish, aquarium plants and equipment, cat furniture (towers and scratching post), specialty litter, and all kinds of pet-related accessories."

When Moraga passed the 1 percent sales tax, a local TV station visited Lenfestey, asking if the new tax would hurt her business. Fortunately, she says it didn't and 2014 was a good year. "People who haven't been here in a while should come in and check it out," she adds. "We'll do everything we can to make them and their pets happy."

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