

Business

Cooking With Kids Foundation, an Enterprise and a Mission

By Sophie Braccini



Lynda Rexroat teaches children how to cook at the Lafayette Recreation Center. Photo provided

Standing by the prep table in the Lafayette Community Center's kitchen, Chef Lynda Rexroat held a big knife, getting ready to slice a carrot. The tiny fingers and palm of a 4-year-old child pressed on Rexroat's steady hand, as she learned the slicing technique. Pretty soon, the youngster

will be cutting the vegetables herself. Learning to prep like a pro and handle knives is just one of the things that the children who attend the Cooking with Kids Foundation classes are learning. Over a four-week period, they learn to prepare and value healthy food and grow an ap-

preciation for what it takes to put dinner on the table. Rexroat not only teaches Lamorinda kids, but also wants to teach children in underprivileged communities how to become healthier.

The Lafayette resident has had an unusual professional life. She was an ultrasonographer at Children's Hospital for years until a back injury stopped her career. Rexroat also studied in Paris to become a pastry chef, "just for the pleasure of it," she remembers. But as a professional door closed, another opened, and she started a wholesale pie business.

"First I was cooking for parties, but my dietary needs changed," she says. "I started to be more interested in healthy choices and looked for ways to reduce sugar, and avoid gluten and dairy." Rexroat developed a new line of pies, without gluten, dairy, and very low glycemic index. The wholesale business was called Apple Lane Bakery, for the many apple trees in her Lafayette garden. Rexroat was selling to cruise lines and large catering establishments like the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley. "More and more people were looking for options for people with diabetes or heart problems," she says.

But one day, a friend of hers planted an idea in her mind. "She said that I should combine my love of children with my love of cooking and teaching," she remembers. "That is how I started Cooking with Kids as an after-school program." Very quickly, Rexroat modified the angle of her business from food appealing to kids, like pizzas and pretzels, to healthy food for kids. "Children can appreciate everything, especially if they are the ones preparing it," she says.

In the kitchen, every moment is used to learn something. Rexroat teaches how to recognize the fruits and vegetables in their raw form, to identify their colors and texture, how to weigh and measure food, how to read labels and make a grocery list, and to always be clean and frequently wash. She even teaches the youngest of her students to use the kitchen tools, emphasizing safety. "Each class has a theme and at the end of class we share the food and critique it," says Rexroat. "We wonder if we would do it again, if it was good for us, and the parents get to taste as well." Then the children do the dishes and clean up.

"My purpose is to help the children to connect with the food, to realize what is healthy and that it can also

be delicious," says Rexroat. "This is important here, but it is even more important in underserved communities. This is why I transformed my business into a nonprofit because the children come first, and it was important to be able to apply for grants and raise money."

Rexroat has invited different people from the community to join the board, including members of the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association with whom she is planning her first fundraiser in the spring. "We would like to raise enough money to acquire a mobile kitchen," she says. Rexroat wants to be able to go to any school to conduct after-school programs, even if they do not have the space and equipment required. She is already teaching several after-school pro-

grams locally at Wagner Ranch Elementary in Orinda, the Husky House Day Care Center and Happy Valley Elementary School in Lafayette as well as other schools in Walnut Creek.

Rexroat is also looking for new members for her board to extend the reach of her mission. "I am looking for chefs, moms of young children, retired business people, teachers," she says. She already has enrolled Lafayette dietician Lisa Ota and Virgil Birgona from the Fremont Bank; Saint Mary's College students will also intern this summer to update her website. For more information, visit www.cwfkf.org.

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

Patrizia Marrone a Fast Success on Fiesta Lane

11 Fiesta Lane, Lafayette - (925) 736-0220

Patrizia Marrone has been curating women's clothes in San Francisco and the East Bay since 1980. She recently moved her successful Blackhawk Plaza store to Lafayette on Fiesta Lane (near the Cooperage). Marrone specializes in unique apparel, accessories and shoes that she selects in shows from all over the world. She was voted Diablo's "Best of the East Bay" several times in either the women's shoes shop or boutique category. Her clients immediately followed her to her new location in Lafayette, making the store an instant success. New customers are also finding their way to the large and bright retail space, full of feminine dresses, tops, shoes and other accessories, from casual to the most sophisticated. "My objective is to build relationships with my clients," she says. "In my store women come looking for a special look they will not find anywhere else. Together we create a total look that uniquely fits them." Marrone says she's had an eye on Lafayette for some time, but wasn't ready to move until now. "Lafayette is perfect for what I offer," she says. "People of all ages come here, sometimes mothers and their daughters." One of her clients who has been shopping with her for 20 years, Mrs. Cheung, came to the boutique with her daughter - and now her granddaughter. Patrons will find apparel from Marrone's favorite designers such as Sarah Pacini or the Crea Collection, and Donald J Pliner shoes, among many others.



Barbara McDaniel, left, tries on a white spring jacket that Patrizia Marrone pairs with a black and white scarf. Photo Sophie Braccini

Orchard Manager Named February's Moraga Employee of the Month

Ken Mulhern, who was a key manager at Orchard Supply Hardware, was named the Moraga Employee of the Month for February. Mulhern handled several different roles at OSH including being the lead manager for the store's support team and heading the store's community outreach program, Neighbors Helping Neighbors. He supervised receiving all goods from the company's distribution center and supervised employees for the customer pick-up area. "Ken was a terrific employee," said Orchard Supply Assistant Manager Victoria Whitman. "He was passionate about customer service. He listened to the customers and provides really good advice on whatever project they are undertaking. He was also really involved with the community and was heading a local project to assist Los Perales Elementary School." Mulhern was promoted to manager of the OSH San Ramon store. In winning the award, the Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce awarded Mulhern a gift card to CVS as well as a gift card to the Golden Palace in Moraga.

News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

Monthly Mixer at GemLust at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 25 at 3529 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

The Lafayette Chamber's Young Professional Group will be meeting from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday, March 26 in the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Conference Room. For more information visit the group's meetup page: www.meetup.com/Young-Professionals-Group-Lafayette-CA/.

Citizen of the Year Dinner honoring Marechal Duncan at 6 p.m. Friday, March 27 at the Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa, 3287 Mt. Diablo Blvd. Reservations required.

Dogtown Downtown from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 11. Dog Parade starts at 10 a.m. from the Lafayette Plaza Park to the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. In addition to the parade there will be demonstrations, exhibits and contests.

Save the date for Earth Day in Lafayette from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, April 26 sponsored by Sustainable Lafayette, the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, and the City of Lafayette. This year's theme: transportation. For more information, visit <http://www.sustainable-lafayette.org/our-events/earth-day-festival>.

Moraga

Chamber of Commerce business meeting from 7:30 to 9 a.m. Friday, March 27 at the Hacienda de las Flores, 2100 Donald Drive.

Registration opened for businesses and groups that want to participate in the 2015 Moraga Faire on May 9. For information, contact Kathe Nelson at Kathe@moragachamber.org.

Orinda

Save the dates: Orinda Trivia Bee Friday, April 24, and State of the City Luncheon on Wednesday, April 29. Orinda Rotary and Orinda Chamber of Commerce jointly sponsor the Trivia Bee. Teams of six compete for the title in a multiple round trivia competition. Attendees come dressed in costume and decorate tables in keeping with the chosen theme for their team. The event takes place at the Orinda Masonic Lodge, 9 Altarinda Rd in Orinda. For information, contact Candy Kattenberg at info@orindachamber.org.

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

Advertising

Go Green and Save Money with CaliforniaFIRST

We all pay the price for comfort during the summer and winter however there is a way to curb what you are paying. Californians are going green in an effort to reduce energy consumption and PG&E costs. One of the many changes you can make is to replace your heating and air conditioning system with high efficiency equipment.

Many cities in the Contra Costa County have adopted The CaliforniaFIRST financing program.

The CaliforniaFIRST Program (CaliforniaFIRST.org) is a Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing program for residential properties. Through an innovative partnership with your county government, CaliforniaFIRST allows property owners to finance the installation of energy and water improvements on homes through the issuance of a municipal bond and pay the amount back as a line item on their property tax bill. Interest on the financing may be tax deductible as it is part of your property taxes. CaliforniaFIRST financing does not rely on your credit rating or debt-to-income ratio.

This program requires only minutes, in the comfort of your home, for approval. All documents to sign and approve are emailed directly to you. There is no paperwork to mail in and no real waiting time for authorization.

Another great aspect of CaliforniaFIRST is that if you decide to sell your home, the balance is transferable to the new owner. This allows you to increase your home's value without adding extra debt to yourself. Any secondary homes or rental properties may also be eligible for this program.

For more information on this innovative program, call Clean Air HVAC at 925-689-7017.

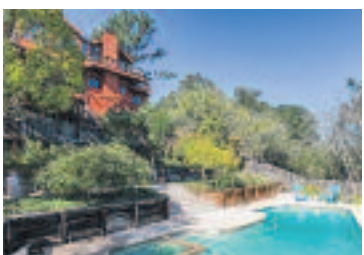
BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY | Drysdale Properties
HomeServices



It's a sign of great things to come in real estate.

8 Camino Encinas
Suite 100
Orinda, CA 94563
(925) 258-4088
www.bhhsdrysdale.com

BERKSHIRE
HATHAWAY
HomeServices



PENDING!
\$1,377,000
15 Crestview Court
Orinda

MB MacLennan/Tony Conte
(925) 324-6246/(925) 708-1396



NEW PRICE!
\$1,350,000
681 Old Jonas Hill Road
Lafayette

Carol Sawdey
(925) 487-2353



HAPPY VALLEY!
\$2,775,000
3822 Palo Alto Drive
Lafayette

Jennifer Griessel
(925) 382-7484