

## Business

## From Online to Brick and Mortar

Local entrepreneurs open Parker Thatch in Orinda

By Sophie Braccini



Irene Chen-Glenby with, from left, Marissa Kjartansson and Alex Bouza

Photo Sophie Braccini

Irene Chen-Glenby says she feels a sense of pride when she looks around her boutique, Parker Thatch. She and her husband, Matthew Glenby, recently opened the store at 19-D Orinda Way in the Hilton House Shopping Center. The Lafayette couple created the high-end personalized bag and accessory business 12 years ago, starting by selling personalized stationery online under the name iomoi.com. The Parker Thatch boutique is their first brick and mortar retail store where they can artistically display their collections.

"People often asked if they could see and touch the products," said Chen-Glenby. "What people do with our products is very personal, so

it is nice to interact in person to see their reaction."

Chen-Glenby grew up in Lafayette. After college and starting her career in New York, she convinced her Canadian husband to move back to California to raise their family and start a business.

"All our products are custom-made," said Chen-Glenby, showing canvas and leather bags of all sizes and styles that clients can embellish with the prints and lettering of their choice. The relatively small store is filled with gift ideas.

The real magic of Parker Thatch—the combined first names of the owners' two children—happens just behind the Orinda storefront. At

the back of the small store, you enter a space 10 times larger, full of computers, printers and shelves of raw materials. "We do everything ourselves," explained Chen-Glenby. Her husband's background is in graphic design and business; Chen-Glenby worked in product development and fashion. Together they develop three collections a year—one for spring, one for fall, and one for the holidays. "It's always a mixture of patterns and icons," she said. "Our aesthetic is traditional with a modern twist."

A majority of Parker Thatch products are gifts, celebrating things, said Chen-Glenby. One mother bought "a little something" for her daughter who was feeling blue, a couple ordered a personalized baby bag for their first born, others purchased graduation gifts. "Whether they order online or in the store, what touches us most about our customers is their thoughtfulness," she said.

The bags, made of high-quality heavy-weight canvas and leather, are not cheap. A gold personalized leather clutch with a tassel costs nearly \$200. But Parker Thatch also offers personalized items such as Lucite trays, stationery, eye masks and paperweights starting at \$25.

One client from San Jose recently sat with Marissa Kjartansson, one of the associates, designing a canvas bag as a wedding gift. "They are going to Maui for their honeymoon," the customer said. "I want to offer them something that they will use there, keep, and will remind

them of their trip." She chose a large canvas bag with leather handles and stripes on the front and back. "Can we use a coral color?" she asked, referring to the couple's wedding colors. She also added their initials on the bag, and inside, a very personal message printed on a canvas square attached to the bag.

The Parker Thatch brand has been regularly featured in fashion magazines, and the company has many celebrity clients. "Julia Roberts did all her stationery with us," noted Chen-Glenby, adding that Kate and Andy Spade have been incredible friends and mentors for her husband and herself. "They are kind and generous with their ideas and thoughts," she said.

People can choose among hundreds of graphics Chen-Glenby and her husband have created and add any text they want. Many of the whimsical, fun and elegant designs are displayed on the boutique's wall. "I love bright colors," Chen-Glenby said. "We want to be a happy product that everybody uses."

Chen-Glenby and her husband felt they needed to open a boutique in their beloved Lamorinda. "For us, being here is a way to contribute to the community we have chosen," she said.

**Parker Thatch**  
19D Orinda Way, Orinda  
www.parkerthatch.com, (925) 282-1098

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## business briefs

## Be Real Bars Now at Whole Foods

www.berealfoods.com



Orinda resident Stephanie Tomasco holds son, James, with daughter, Olivia, in the Whole Foods aisle where Be Real Bars are sold. Photo S. Braccini

Last year when we featured Stephanie Tomasco's new company, Be Real Foods, she was in the process of funding it through a Kickstarter campaign. The project took off nicely, and she surpassed her \$20,000 goal. The Orinda "mompreneur" originally developed kid-friendly, healthy, gluten-free bars when she realized that family members had a gluten allergy, and she also wanted a bar that her daughter would love but would not be overloaded with sugar. Tomasco recently completed Whole Foods' scrutiny process to be accepted as a vendor. "I am now on shelves at Diablo Foods, Draeger's, Lunardi's, and other smaller retail like Piedmont Grocery," she says. And the chocolate brownie and oatmeal raisin bars are on aisle six at Whole Foods. Now this mother of two small children is focusing on marketing. "I want to go to stores and do some testing with the customers," says Tomasco, like one taste testing event she did at Diablo Foods. She values the feedback she gets from customers at these events. "Once the first two flavors get a lot of traction I will add two new ones," she says. Tomasco chose a wheat-free factory in Oakland to make the bars and uses a protocol to make sure they are gluten-free. "I chose a local site because I felt I would have better oversight," she adds. The bars can also be found online at www.berealfoods.com; the promotion code FF30 will give you a 30 percent discount.

## Double Celebration for Lafayette Car Wash and Detail Center

3319 Mt. Diablo Blvd. Lafayette, (925) 283-1190  
www.lafayettecarwash.com/



From left: Blake Wellen, Jess Wellen and Theresa Wellen

Photo Andy Schreck

Lafayette Car Wash owner Jess Wellen recently celebrated the 25th anniversary owning the business with co-owner

and son, Blake Wellen. Plus on Earth Day, the local business will receive the Lafayette Award of Environmental Excellence, also known as the Green Award, along with Metro restaurant in the business category. "We are doing everything we can to save energy and water in our business," says Blake Wellen. Over the years, the business was transformed from an old facility to a state-of-the-art detailing facility where 60 percent of the water is recycled, and other services were added such as touch-up paint and body repair. "A lot of groups used to have car washes to raise funds," adds the business co-owner. "With the drought situation, they are contacting us so we can partner." For the Wellens being part of and giving back to the community has always been a priority and they both have been very active in Lafayette. Blake's wife, Julie Rubio, is also a Lafayette business owner with the J. Colleen Boutique at 261 Lafayette Circle, while Jess' wife, Theresa, manages the back end of the business. "Four of our employees have been with us for more than 20 years and more are coming up on 20 years," says Blake Wellen. "It's been great for all of us doing business in this wonderful community."

## Two Senior Helpers Events for First Responders and Medical Personnel

Senior Helpers is sponsoring two events headlined by national dementia expert Teepa Snow on Monday, May 4. Snow will address how to assist people with dementia in an emergency situation when routines have disintegrated. The first seminar is for first responders including fire personnel, police officers, EMTs and others who interact with the public, and is being co-sponsored by the Moraga-Orinda Fire Department. The information is relevant for anybody who may need to assist a family member or other person during an emergency situation. It is scheduled from 10 a.m. to noon at the Orinda Community Auditorium, adjacent to the Orinda Library. Two Category One continuing education units are being offered free of charge at the event for emergency personnel and first responders. Reservations can be made by calling the MOFD at (925) 258-4514. The second event is offered at John Muir Medical Center the same day for medical personnel. For information, contact Kevin Reneau at Senior Helpers: (925) 376-8000.

## News from the Three Chambers of Commerce Lafayette

Monthly Mixer at Merrill Gardens at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 22 at 1010 Second Street.

## Moraga

Moraga Chamber Mixer at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 28 at the Serbian Church, 1700 School Street, sponsored by Moraga Rotary, the Lion's Club and RecycleSmart.org.

Save the date for the Moraga Community Faire on May 9.

## Orinda

The Orinda Trivia Bee will be at 5 p.m. Friday, April 24. 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.

The State of the City Luncheon is scheduled from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 29 at the Orinda Country Club. Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer will provide an update on all of the latest issues facing the community. For information, visit www.orindarotary.org.

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