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Business

Claim Your Space in Lafayette's Latest Hideout

By A.K. Carroll



Photos A.K. Carroll

“You know that space you walked into as a kid? The place you took all your favorite things and made into your own?” J.B. Balingit asks as he gestures over a plate of bright orange sweet potato fries. He sits across from me at a patio table outside of the Hideout Kitchen & Cafe on a Wednesday afternoon, the sun scarcely slipping through tree branches and umbrellas. “That’s the sort of place I had in mind.”

I take a bite of a thick crisp tuna melt, juicy tomatoes and fresh cucumbers enclosed between a layer of cheese and a layer of tuna salad, all of it sandwiched in panini-pressed slices of Boudin sourdough. “The tuna melt is from Little Star,” says Balingit. “But the curry wrap is an original.”

Much like the cafe’s decor, Hideout’s menus are an eclectic array of favorites, from a waffle sandwich stuffed with country-fried steak and doused in syrup and gravy to the Lafayette salad loaded with summer berries, cucumbers and crushed almonds, to a bowl of clams and mussels soaking in a white wine butter sauce. Compiled and executed by Balingit himself, the menu reflects a range of culinary influences.

Born in Los Angeles and raised by Filipino parents, Balingit grew up immersed in the bold sauces and dark, rich flavors of Spanish and Filipino-influenced dishes. At age 10 his family moved to the Philippines, where his parents inherited his grandmother’s restaurant and catering company. “I grew up eating what was available,” says Balingit, who became accustomed to having food grown within walking distance of his family’s kitchen, much of it in his own backyard. Farm-to-table wasn’t a concept – it was the only way of eating.

Balingit didn’t officially enter the culinary scene until moving back to California. After filling out 87 job applications, he started as a busboy at Fresh Choice, a humbling experience for the ambitious 19-year-old. “I wasn’t afraid of hard work,” says Balingit, who learned the importance of good service as he progressed from busboy to food runner to server to line cook, and finally to sous chef, working at Chevys (Pleasant Hill), Little Star Cafe (Walnut Creek), and Pasta Pomodoro (Pleasant Hill) before making it to the Sausalito Yacht Club, where he began honing his culinary skills.

Balingit later spent valuable time working in San Francisco’s Brickhouse Café and brainstorming with local chefs, but his strongest culinary ties were back in the East Bay with John, Dave, and Chris Marcovici, owners of Jack’s Restaurant and Bar (Pleasant Hill). “The only reason I was confident enough to open this place were the skills they gave me,” says Balingit of his experience as Jack’s sous chef and director of culinary operations.

“What it is now is exactly how I envisioned it when I drove into the parking lot the first time.” Though the name was a while coming, the Hideout has become just that – a place where Balingit has brought many of his favorite things, including a collection of old Hangar One bottles, mix and match silverware, reclaimed wood, and handmade art installations. “Every piece of furniture has a story,” he says.

The interior of the restaurant resembles a well-swept barn with a flair of rustic charm from exposed brick, distressed wood, repurposed fruit crates, and caged light fixtures. Sturdy tables with mismatched antique chairs seat 2-6 guests, a bar is lined with high-backed seats and a “wine room” can hold parties of 8-10. The space is small, but not crowded, with a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows that open to the outdoor patio and let in light.

The Hideout isn’t a place to visit if you have a movie to catch

or a deadline to meet. The service is slow, but sincere, and for the most part that’s by design. It may be a generous 20 minutes between your heirloom tomato bruschetta and bacon-sage brussel sprouts, and your waiter may not ask after you often, but when he does he will really mean it. The spot is better suited for a leisurely evening than a power lunch, with a minimal kitchen staff putting things together plate-by-plate.

Lunch, dinner, and weekend brunch menus are seasonally influenced and extensive in their offerings. With an array of sandwiches and wraps, salads, pastas, and entrees that range from fried chicken and biscuits to rack of lamb served with sweet sautéed kale, you’re almost certain to find something that suits your palate. Just be sure to order enough wine to sip as you await its arrival.

Bring a book, bring a friend, bring whatever it is that will make the Hideout feel like home and spend some time making this space your space, as you nibble and nosh through a meal.

The Hideout Kitchen and Cafe
3406 Mt Diablo Blvd, Lafayette
(925) 900-8861



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

Seven Hills School Welcomes New Headmaster

975 North San Carlos Drive, Walnut Creek
(925) 933-0666 – sevenhillsschool.org

Kathleen McNamara will begin her tenure as Head of School at The Seven Hills School effective July 1. Most recently, she has been Head of School at Tuxedo Park School in Tuxedo Park, New York. The Seven Hills School, an independent school serving approximately 400 preschool through eighth grade students, many of whom are from Lamorinda, was founded in 1962, and sits at the edge of Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek. “Kathleen is the perfect leader for Seven Hills,” Sameer Hilal, chair of the school’s Board of Trustees said, “with broad and deep experience in independent school teaching and leadership. She embraces the distinctive mission of Seven Hills, respects the school visionaries on whose shoulders we now stand, and will lead with an innovative spirit toward the future. We considered 65 candidates for this important post, from around the world, and we’re confident we’ve found a great leader.”

Hilal expressed his appreciation to Bill Miller, headmaster at Seven Hills for the past 23 years, who retired on June 30. “We are thankful to Bill for his exemplary service to Seven Hills,” Hilal said. “When he arrived on our campus in 1992, he created a transformative vision of a school that would change the face of education in San Francisco’s East Bay communities. He succeeded wildly and has our deepest gratitude.”

News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

The Entrepreneur’s Club will meet at 8:30 a.m. Thursday, July 16 in the Chamber Conference Room.

Enjoy Coffee with the Mayor at 8 a.m. Friday, July 24 in the Chamber Conference Room.

There is a Green Committee meeting scheduled at noon Tuesday, July 28 in the Chamber Conference Room. For information, visit lafayettechamber.org.

Orinda

The Chamber staff will be working at a hot dog concession stand after the Fourth of July Parade at the Community Center Park. Stop by and say hello.

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

Lafayette

Sack the Bag

Drugstore CVS will switch over to recycled paper bags without a problem since they have other stores that currently use paper bags. “In compliance with the city of Lafayette’s new ordinance, as of July 1, we will no longer provide plastic, single-use carryout bags to our customers,” said Stephanie Cunha, public relations manager. “Per the ordinance, reusable plastic and paper bags will be available upon request for a 10 cents per bag fee. Our reusable bags are made from post-consumer recycled material and are 100 percent recyclable.”

The goal of the new ordinance is to reduce litter and waste, encourage reusable bags as well as reduce contamination in recycling and composting programs. According to the city website page under Green Lafayette, “The purpose of the regulations is to reduce the impact of disposable bags on the city and the environment. A charge per bag has been shown to reduce the number of disposable bags used.”

Single use plastic bags are the

most common type of litter, and most types of plastic bags are not biodegradable. It’s estimated that more than 13 billion single-use plastic bags are generated in California annually, which translates into approximately 247 million pounds of bags that end up in landfills every year, according to the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery. The new rules help fulfill the city’s environmental strategy that includes a goal of diverting 75 percent of solid waste from landfill.

Plastic bags without handles that carry produce, meat, chicken or bulk items will still be complimentary at stores.

Code Enforcement Officer Adam Foster will be on the job to ensure that businesses are monitored, but he’s likely to encourage a carrot rather than a stick approach. “The city’s new ordinance requires a number of businesses to make adjustments,” he said. “Extensive education and outreach will be offered before any enforcement is conducted.”

This is “a long time coming” said

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Michael Cass, associate planner and staff liaison to the Environmental Task Force. He anticipates an adjustment period, but adds the city is dedicated to “work with businesses to help them succeed.” The Lafayette regulations are modeled after Walnut Creek’s plastic bag ordinance that started in September of 2014. Moraga and Orinda have no bag ban.

If the bag ban concept seems vaguely familiar, residents may recall back in October 2014 Gov. Jerry Brown signing into law Senate Bill 270, the landmark bill banning single use bags statewide that was supposed to go into effect on Jan. 1, 2015. Shortly after SB 270 was signed into law, the American Progressive Bag Alliance, representing the plastic bag manufacturing industry, gathered signatures to qualify for a referendum to repeal it. The organization collected over 800,000 signatures from California voters, more than enough to qualify to put the referendum on the ballot. Regardless of the outcome of that vote, Lafayette is saying goodbye to plastic bags.

Lafayette

EBMUD Work

Construction should start in the late summer or early fall, says Blackwell.

Also breaking up the asphalt

and usually peaceful ambiance of Las Huertas will be 1,600 feet of relocated pipeline and water main replacement under the street, which is

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being relocated due to age and its fragile state that would not tolerate expected road reconstruction, planned for the near future.