

Business

# Hofssi Chocolates - Chocolatières of Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



Sisters Linda Hofmeister, left, and Susan Rossi show their creations.

When most people hear the word gianduja, the first thing that comes to mind probably is not chocolate. The delicious blend of roasted nuts and chocolate was born in Italy in 1806. Napoleon's Continental Blockade of British imports created a cocoa shortage that led Italian bakers in the Piedmont area to reduce the amount of cocoa in their chocolate recipe and substitute it with roasted hazelnuts. Gianduja is the main product of Moraga-based Hofssi Chocolates.

Sisters Linda Hofmeister and Susan Rossi, owners of Hofssi – the name a combination of the chocolatiers' last names – started making the concoction in their homes. Hofssi's gianduja consists

of 40 percent nuts, ground to a very thin powder, mixed with dark or milk chocolate and wrapped in foil. The darkest chocolates are their best sellers, appreciated by those who want intense flavor. They also make toffees and caramels for demanding foodies as part of their cottage business.

"Four years ago, Linda started making chocolate," says Rossi. "She went to Costa Rica, visited farms, learned about the industry and techniques that transform the beans. Then a year ago, she called me and told me she was ready to start a business." At the time, with her children starting to be more independent, Rossi was thinking of restarting her law career. "I decided to join my sister instead."

The sisters' adventure has been some years in the making. Hofmeister and Rossi were born five years apart in a family of seven. Rossi, a lawyer with a baking undercurrent, started making sweets when she was 10, while Hofmeister was a commercial lender, described by her sister as an artist always ready to explore new forms and techniques. They both lived in Lamorinda until 12 years ago when Hofmeister moved to Minnesota; she has been back in Moraga now for a few months.

While Hofmeister prepared to move her family back to Lamorinda, Rossi took classes. "I trained with Ecole Chocolat, a very comprehensive online school," explains the Moraga mom. "They have a lot of videos, and every type of chocolate transformation is practiced. I learned how to temper chocolate, how to move the hands and tools, and one day we made gianduja. I could not believe what I was tasting, it was so good, and no one else had it."

Both Rossi and her sister have high food standards. "We call it conscious consumption," says Hofmeister. They select organic ingredients every time it is possible, and will experiment as long as needed to make it work. For the gianduja, Rossi uses raw California organic almonds and Oregon organic hazelnuts from Honor Earth Farms. They use the Guitard organic line, and add organic powdered sugar and dairy from local organic farms to their chocolate and toffees, which Hofmeister made for years as gifts for friends

at Christmastime. Hofmeister also makes caramels in a variety of flavorful combinations: classic sea salt, coffee, chocolate, coffee/almond/cocoa nib and a more exotic cardamom/ginger/cashew, and dark or milk chocolate covered sea salt.

Both Hofmeister and Rossi have Cottage Food Operator licenses, which allows them to make and market food items from their homes. Susan Marconi at Across the Way in Moraga was the first retailer to take in Hofssi products. "It sells very well," says the store manager. "When I cut out small pieces for people to taste, it is a sure way to see it go very fast." Other retail outlets in Lafayette also carry Hofssi Chocolates: Floret at 3581 Mt. Di-

ablo Blvd., Lazy K - the Orchard Nursery gift shop, Diablo Foods, and Clocks Etc. in La Fiesta Square. Orinda Books will offer the products in December.

"When I'd like Hofssi to be in a store, I just go in, give them samples and show them the packaging," says Rossi. "If you catch them at a good time, people love it."

The two sisters have many creative ideas on how to grow their business.

"I'd love to have a store," says Rossi, "but we do not want it to become too big because it is important for us to control the quality of our products."

*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

### Caroline Salon is Moving

57 Lafayette Circle - 2nd floor - (925) 284-1474 - [carolinessalon.net](http://carolinessalon.net)

Caroline Salon this week was expected to move to higher ground on Lafayette Circle. The new locale is across the parking lot from the former location (33 Lafayette Circle), and is now just above Chow. The entrance is between Chow and Nitro Dog. The salon is taking advantage of the new space to add additional services with more professionals joining Caroline Wiseman's team: Kazuko Kantor, master hair stylist and colorist; Jennifer El-Gohary, skin care specialist/esthetician (formerly brows only); Callie Reyerson, eyelash extension specialist; and Kristina Hong and Vanessa Love, nail care specialists.

### Bistro Burger & Grill Opens in Lafayette

965 Mountain View Drive

San Francisco-based Bistro Burger & Grill recently opened its fifth location in Lafayette, across from Trader Joe's on Mountain View Drive where Susan Foord Café was located for so many years. The restaurant has been completely remodeled by Ali Kazemi, who also owns the four other locations. The style adopted is modern and elegant, with reclaimed wood tables and bar, dark tiles mimicking wood floors, and colorful original art on the walls. Two digital TVs hang over the large bar, and Kazemi



Chef Pietro Buttita, left, and owner Ali Kazemi at Bistro Burger & Grill in Lafayette the day before opening

Photo Sophie Braccini says there will be a DJ Fridays. Kazemi hired chef Pietro Buttita for the Lafayette location. The menu includes a large selection of burgers made with Niman Ranch pasture-raised beef, salads, sandwiches, pastas, and grilled fish, as well as an extensive list of cocktails, wines, smoothies and milkshakes.

### Wax A Peel in Lafayette

3579 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette - [www.waxapeel.com/](http://www.waxapeel.com/)

Leah Henrikson moved her salon Wax A Peel this summer from Pleasant Hill to Mt. Diablo Boulevard, next to Francesca and across from Postino's parking lot. The licensed esthetician and her team specialize in facial and body waxing as well as facial peels. "We use nothing but hard wax (stripless wax) for all the sensitive areas, such as your bikini, underarms and facial waxing," she states online. "(For) all bikini and Brazilian wax's we offer you numbing spray and a glass of champagne or wine to help put you at ease."

### Stat Med Expands to Pleasant Hill

970 Dewing Ave #100b, Lafayette

901 Sunvalley Blvd., southwest corner of Sunvalley Mall on the border of Pleasant Hill/Concord

[www.statmed.com](http://www.statmed.com)

In 2014 Dr. Armando Samaniego and his team of ER trained professionals opened their first urgent care service, offered seven days a week, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and weekends and holidays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Lafayette. The facility offers non-life threatening emergency care. "As many as 70 percent of Emergency Room visits are not life-threatening and can be treated in an urgent care setting with appropriately trained physicians," notes Samaniego. Now the Stat Med team has opened a new state-of-the-art facility serving the Pleasant Hill/Concord area, as well as northern Lafayette residents, who may find the Sunvalley location closer to home.

### News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

#### Lafayette

Ribbon cutting for Wax A Peel on Thursday, at 5 p.m. Oct. 8 at 3579 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

October Mixer at Bradley School of Music from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 28 at 1042 Brown Ave.

#### Moraga

Business meeting opened to members and interested parties at 8 a.m. Friday, Oct. 30 at the Fireside room at the Hacienda de las Flores, 2100 Donald Drive. Stephanie Shaterian, owner of fLO Content Marketing, will discuss how to create marketing videos.

#### Orinda

Orinda Chamber Luncheon with guest speaker NFL Veteran Drew Bennett at noon Friday, Oct. 16 at the Orinda Country Club. Cost: \$30. RSVP online by Oct. 14 at [www.orindachamber.org](http://www.orindachamber.org).

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

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