

Business

# Agemark Senior Living and Memory Care Communities Managed From Orinda

By Sophie Braccini



Forrest and Richard Westin, right, in Agemark's Orinda office

Photo Sophie Braccini

Lamorinda does not just have retail or small business operations. Some larger companies are run from offices tucked away in commercial areas, like Agemark. Founded 36 years ago by Orinda resident Richard Westin, Agemark owns and operates assisted living and memory care residences across the country, employing 800 people.

"It's become my passion and mission in life," says Westin.

Throughout Westin's professional life, the lawyer, turned commercial property investor, turned assistant living community business owner was able to recognize and seize opportu-

nities when they came his way. When he was practicing law, a client asked him to lend him money to enter a real estate deal. Westin offered to partner instead, launching his career in commercial real estate. The assisted living opportunity came a few years later.

"I had bought a gorgeous building in Tacoma, Washington partnering with Jesse Pitore," remembers Westin. "It was an old YMCA built in 1906 and we had the project to leave the exterior intact and transform the inside into an office building. We went to the bank to get a loan and the banker said, 'I'm not going to give you a loan. We have too many office buildings

in Tacoma.' I asked if there would be another use he would give us a loan for and he answered, 'Have you ever heard of assisted living?'" This was in the 1980s, when these types of facilities were not being developed much, but Westin looked into it and decided to go for it with Pitore, who is still his Agemark partner today. "It was totally fortuitous, and I fell head over heels in love with the business," says Westin, "because unlike renting apartments to interchangeable renters, now I'm taking care of very frail elderly at the end of their lives and I have a chance to make a difference. I truly found my calling."

Westin's business philosophy came from his years as a young adult, when he worked with Club Med in Europe as a sailing and ski instructor. Gilbert Trigano, founder of Club Med, is one of his mentors and it was there that Westin learned about hospitality and dealing with large groups of people. "When it came time to design programing and lifestyle for the elderly in our various locations I tapped into this background. We truly do Club Med for the elderly." Westin is full of stories about his residents, whether it is about taking memory care residents bowling or boating, or offering other diverse experiences to assisted living clients, who he believes still want to have fun. "We had a lady who turned 102 in one of our Baltimore properties who said to me that she had never been to a Baltimore Orioles game. Ten days later, when the New York Yankees came to town to play the Orioles, she threw out the first pitch. That is the Club Med in us." Westin sees his business as social first, fully engaging residents. Westin believes that the multiple awards Agemark won are a result of this policy. His son, Forrest, has been involved for the last 12 years as well.

Agemark residences are either for assisted living, memory care or a combination of both. Today the partners own 15 properties, with an additional three under construction and five in the approval process. Many of the properties are old grand hotels that were built in railroad towns at the turn of the 20th century. "We have these gorgeous hotels that were very fancy, where a lot of social functions took place, that fell out of favor when the railroads fell out of favor," says Westin. "In the '80s we came along and bought them, and donated the air rights and facades to local historical societies so the buildings would stay forever." All kinds of important social events are taking place in the facilities again. "There is something charming in these older buildings filled with people who went to their high school proms in there, and then 60 or 70 years later the kids from this generation are coming back to celebrate their proms, filling the place with youthful energy. We become a serious part of the community. We do not warehouse or isolate people."

There is no Agemark community in Orinda, Lafayette or Moraga. But that might change in the future, says Westin, a longtime volunteer in the community who was named the 2012 Orinda Citizen of the Year. "We own a property next to the Wilder development site," he says, "and there is a need in Orinda for a first-class project." So far it has not worked, but Westin says that if all goes as planned an application will be filed with the city in the first quarter of 2016.

"If you're persistent and hopeful," he says, "something will happen."

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

From Front Page

## DA Sends Shockwaves Through Water Polo Community

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"Generally the incident must be extreme, out of the ordinary and highly dangerous to be considered a criminal act," said Michael McCann, a law professor at the University of New Hampshire who heads the school's Sports and Entertainment Institute. "For that reason, I think the traditional answer is it is an extremely high threshold for when an incident becomes a criminal act, as sports incidents almost never lead to criminal charges."

During KQED's hour-long treatment of the issue on Dec. 22, Alan Milstein, an attorney who specializes in sports litigation, noted that most cases involving sports brutality and criminal proceedings have been in Canada in the sport of hockey. He also noted there are typically four considerations in cases like these: the nature of the game (is it a contact sport?), the nature of the act (was it inadvertent or purposeful?), the degree of force applied, and intent (was there an intent to do harm?).

Water polo is a notoriously difficult sport to referee, since most of the players' bodies are submerged in water.

"You only see the last five percent of the player's body," MAC Water Polo Referee Association

president Jeff Roy explained. "They're just floating heads."

Roy and others pointed out how the pervasiveness of video-recording devices, smart phones and cameras, are changing the game. The ubiquity of such devices have changed the way other realms of law are being prosecuted, perhaps most notably in the scourge of police brutality cases scattered across the country. If homemade videos become part of the fabric of sports and litigation, more cases like this could emerge and some worry there will be costly unintended consequences, like the need for more insurance.

Roy, who's been in the sport for 45 years, expressed this sentiment in a letter to the District Attorney:

"If this criminal case survives our judicial system, contact sports for high school athletics will need to be evaluated upon whether or not schools will continue to offer these athletic events." He continued, "The slope is very slippery if we head down this path, once we let a 'criminal action' of this sort take place. The cost to support high school athletics will probably skyrocket! Liability insurance for everyone who participates will be a costly result."

## business briefs

### New Addiction Recovery Classes at Earth and Sea Yoga

3400 Mt Diablo Blvd., Suite 209, Lafayette  
Karen.Y12SR@gmail.com, www.Y12SR.com

Karen Ann Richards is offering 12-Step Recovery Yoga classes that combine the practical tools of the 12-step program with the ancient wisdom of yoga at Earth and Sea Yoga in Lafayette Mondays at 1:30 p.m. and Fridays at 7 p.m. (Y12SR class). The class is a 12-step based discussion and yoga practice open to anyone and everyone dealing with their own addictive behavior or affected by the addictive behavior of others. It is an open and inclusive group and all are welcome. Suggested donation: \$10, but no one is turned away. A portion of the money collected goes to The Rectory Women's Recovery Center.

### Lafayette Car Wash Gets WaterSmart Business Award



Blake Wellen receives the WaterSmart Business Award  
Photo provided

The East Bay Municipal Utility District on Nov. 10 awarded Lafayette Car Wash and Detail Center the WaterSmart Certification award in recognition of its outstanding water management practices. "Through your efforts, you have helped preserve our valuable natural resources and improved your operation's bottom line," wrote EBMUD General Manager Alexander Coate in a letter to the Lafayette business.

### Large Portion of the Rheem Shopping Center Sold

www.usrpartners.com  
U.S. Realty Partners, a privately held real estate investment company specializing in the acquisition, asset management, development and redevelopment of retail properties located in the western United States, recently bought the largest part of the Rheem Shopping Center, from CVS to CAPA, that was owned by Kimco Realty.

### Police Officer Named Moraga Employee of the Month



From left: St. Brian South, Chief Bob Priebe, Moraga Chamber President Kevin Reneau  
Photo provided

Detective Sargent Brian South of the Moraga Police Department has been named the Moraga Employee of the Month for December. South has been with the town's police for the past 13 years, supervising the town's patrol activities and personnel as well as conducting investigations and serving as the liaison with the District Attorney's office. He is president of the Moraga Police Officers' Association and manages the department's annual Kid's Day at the Rheem Theatre to support Special Olympics. The Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce will award South with gift cards from Safeway and the Home/Made Kitchen Cafe in Moraga at an upcoming Moraga Rotary lunch in January.

### News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

The Chambers of Commerce are closed until 2016. No events are scheduled during the first part of January.

#### Lafayette Chamber of Commerce

2016 Business Persons of the Year Dinner and State of the City Address. The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce will honor Andy and Wendy Scheck, owners of Lamorinda Weekly, as the 2016 Business Persons of the Year. The evening will also include the State of the City address by Mayor Mark Mitchell. Reception at 6 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 29 at the Lafayette Park Hotel & Spa, 3287 Mt. Diablo Blvd. For reservations contact the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce at (925) 284-7404, or online at www.lafayettechamber.org under "important links" on the home page.

#### Moraga Chamber of Commerce

Save the date for the Chamber's Business and Community Symposium from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 19 at Saint Mary's Soda Center where panelists will discuss the "State of Moraga Business 2016 - Challenges and Opportunities for Businesses in Our Cul-de-Sac Community." Free and open to the community. Refreshments will be served.

## Celebrating an Anniversary?

If your business is celebrating a significant anniversary (5, 10, 20 years or more ...) send us a photo of your business, the owner(s) or the staff with specific information about your business and what you're celebrating, and we'll include it in an upcoming issue.

please...



...thanks!

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