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## Lamorinda Weekly Publishers Named Lafayette's Business Persons of the Year

By Lou Fancher



Wendy and Andy Scheck

Sometimes, the way to break out of the box in the business world is to stay contained within tight parameters.

Putting that counterintuitive practice into play, Andy and Wendy Scheck, owners of the locally-owned, independent Lamorinda Weekly newspaper, are the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce's 2016 Business Persons of the Year. A dinner Jan. 29 at the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa will honor their contributions and include a State of the City address by Mayor Mark Mitchell and the introduction of the 2016 Chamber Board of Directors.

Keeping a tight watch on expansion, never sacrificing quality for profit, and an unflinching dedication to core staff have been the Schecks' continued goal, and print - on old-fashioned paper -

remains their primary objective.

Lafayette City Manager Steve Falk recalls how virtually no news was published about the bustling city during the year before the weekly launched in March 2007, as more media outlets shifted to the Internet. He wondered how an uninformed citizenship could behave responsibly. "America's founders understood this; that's why they added the first constitutional amendment guaranteeing a free press," Falk writes in an email. "For there to be good government, it is critical that every resident have access to trustworthy news."

But powering social change, performing the role of independent watchdog, uncovering corruption and inspiring the public with uplifting stories demands more than just freedom, newsprint or an open mouth. Discernment, honesty, investigation and reflection - and compassion, a characteristic not often used in conjunction with the press - lend credibility and spark loyalty. "They say the darkest hour is right before the dawn, and the Schecks arrived at just the right time to fill the local news void left by the Internet revolution," Falk says. "Lafayette and all of Lamorinda is better off as a result."

Chamber Executive Director Jay Lifson says the Schecks have been nominated for the award numerous times and he told them to let people know their news. "There are a lot of people who really appreciate what they do," he says.

Despite some hesitation - even resistance - to "tooting their own horn" in their paper, the Schecks are justifiably proud to be planning their 10th anniversary year coming in 2017. They credit their success to a business model based on their original concept and principles. And without longtime contributors - former editor Lee Borrowman, current editor Jennifer Wake, senior staff writers Cathy Tyson and Sophie Braccini and others - the Schecks say the Lamorinda Weekly would not have achieved their final goal: a 100 percent focus on editorial content.

Although it pains her to do so because she is the paper's primary sales force, Wendy says they occasionally turn advertisers down. "We were going to expand last year. We had a lot of advertising and the pages were getting full. We started to do a second press run, add more sections, create more content. Then we realized it was burning everybody out, our costs were going up, the paper was getting too thick. People couldn't read it all. We made a hard decision to limit it to 36 pages. We had to say no to some advertisers. It saved us from going insane."

It also preserved their main customer base: readers. "In a community newspaper, we don't report on national news. If we don't get local people to read it, the advertisers will realize there's no value in the paper," says Andy. "That's why we focus on the reader."

During a time when Wake battled breast cancer, she remembers being rejuvenated by silly staff meeting photos sent by Andy with everyone wearing Hawaiian leis and holding encouraging signs. "It helped me get through it. It's like that with Andy and Wendy. People first."

In the end, what takes a 16-page paper and builds it into a 36-page bi-weekly that reports local stories that range from critical governance and development news to swim meet scores to gardening and homes is a belief in intensity and quality, not size. "There is a long list, a history of people who have grown their companies and changed their characters. We don't want to be on that list," Andy says.

Instead, "continued trust" are the operative words and the future dream. Oh that, and maybe a vacation longer than one week during their 10th anniversary as owners and publishers of The Lamorinda Weekly.

For an archival run up of the paper's early history, visit Milestones:

<http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0601/Lamorinda-Weekly-Milestones.html>

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