

Ware Designs
Fine Jewelry since 1977
Expanding our Services with
 Two Goldsmiths


- Custom Designs
- Appraisals
- Expert Repairs
- Pearl Restringing

All your jewelry is insured with Jeweler's Block Insurance.

\$5 off Watch Battery
 Reg \$15, Now \$10
1 watch battery per person. Exp. 2/29/16. Usually installed while you wait. W/coupon. Restrictions apply.

3645 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette between Trader Joes & the Post Office
 283-2988 www.waredesigns.com Tuesday-Saturday 10-6

GET AHEAD IN MATH THIS YEAR



WHEN MATH MAKES SENSE, YOU SUCCEED!

MATHNASIUM
 The Math Learning Center

GRADES K-12
 Pre-Algebra • Algebra 1 & 2 • Geometry
 Pre-Calculus & Calculus
 SAT/ACT Preparatory
 Individualized Instruction

HOMEWORK HELP FOR ALL LEVELS
Flat Monthly Fee
Drop-in any time, no scheduling needed!

1 WEEK FREE TUTORING & HOMEWORK HELP
Must present coupon. New students only.


3435 Mt. Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette
 (Golden Gate Way at Mt. Diablo Blvd.)
(925) 283-4200 www.mathnasium.com

The Writing Studio
 A Place for Young Writers

February 8 - April 1

Join **THE WRITING STUDIO** this winter as your children enter a world of **CREATIVE NARRATIVE AND ESSAY-BASED EXPOSITORY WRITING PROJECTS**. Through grade appropriate classes and one-on-one sessions, students learn proper sentence structure, organizational skills, the elements of well-written essays, creative use of descriptive words, correct grammar, usage, and so much more.

THE WRITING STUDIO is open to elementary, middle and high school students who strive to improve their writing skills. Projects consist of absorbing writing assignments, from first person narratives and persuasive essays to biographies and research projects. Our ten-week program will take place February 8 - April 1. For further information, visit www.lafayettewritingstudio.com or call 925-385-0211.



THE WRITING STUDIO
 Where Words Come to Life

3455 Golden Gate Way, Suite A, Lafayette (925) 385-0211



TREE SCULPTURE

COMPLETE TREE CARE
Proudly serving the East Bay since 1965!
 Fully Insured ♦ Certified Arborists ♦ License #655977
(925) 254-7233 ♦ www.treesculpture.com



Award Winning Program

Old Firehouse School
 enrolling for the
 2016-2017 school year
www.oldfirehouseschool.com

Lafayette Open House
 Jan.25th, Feb.22nd
 6:30 p.m.
 984 Moraga Road
 (925) 284-4321

Walnut Creek Open House
 Jan.11th, Feb.8th
 6:30 p.m.
 55 Eckley Lane
 (925) 934-1507



Open Houses are for **adults only**

Where's the Greed, Lamorinda?

By Nick Marnell

With rates skyrocketing for hotel rooms and home stays around the Super Bowl 50 weekend, I figured that property owners in Lamorinda would participate in the shakedown. And why shouldn't they? We're only a few hundred dollar-limo ride from Levi's Stadium, and visitors staying in Lamorinda will have less to worry about safety-wise than nearly any other place in the Bay Area.

I used the four-day period of Feb. 4-8 as my example when I called around to Lamorinda real estate agents to ask if they had seen any interest from their clients in renting for that big game weekend.

"Not really," was all I could get from Julie del Santo, broker at the Dudum Group, though I do believe I heard the sounds of a child in the background who required more of her attention that I did. I then tried Dana Green of Pacific Union.

"I don't really know anybody who's trying," said Green. "They probably don't need us for that, anyway." She directed me to Airbnb, VRBO and Craigslist, and she also supplied me with a dose of reality.

"The renters probably don't want the cities to know about it," she said.

VRBO, Vacation Rentals by Owner, part of the Home Away group, listed very few availabilities

in Lamorinda. A stunning custom adobe estate in Hunsaker Canyon blew me away: only \$1,150 a night for those four days. But Karen Schneider, the owner, told me she had received no requests for that period. "It is not rented for Super Bowl weekend and we have not made any special effort to do so. We are sort of enjoying the lull since December and New Year's," she said.

Craigslist posted a rental in Orinda – a 2 bedroom, 1150 square foot flat – for only \$125 a night. Surely the opportunity was there to make a killing for the big game weekend. I asked the owner what it would cost to rent for that four-day period.

"Sorry, the minimum required stay is two weeks," was the response I received through the website.

Airbnb property owners were my last resort. I contacted the owner of this breathtaking property for rent near Camino Encinas in Orinda:

"Grand executive 5-bedroom, 5-bathroom home with pool/spa/BBQ/sports court. 5-minute walk to BART and town. A truly unique property with two fireplaces (kitchen & great room) inside and one outdoor fireplace. Will host family or group for business or fun." Perfect. And a reasonable \$3,975 for the four nights.

"Hmmm. I haven't had any interest so far, but you've reminded me that I should probably raise the price for that weekend," said the owner. Not only that, but he pointed out another angle to fatten the golden goose.

"There's the two-week lull before the game. As the game approaches, and last-minute visitors from the teams' cities need lodging, interest may increase," he said.

The owner of an Airbnb "clean and bright townhome in Moraga," who had not heard from any prospective clients yet, needed no jump start from me. "Of course I've thought about that," she said. "I've doubled the price for that weekend. And I don't really know much about football." She does know economics.

Which may explain what is really going on here: economics. The affluent residents of Lamorinda understand the rules of supply and demand, and if they are going to take advantage of this special event window, they will probably not advertise until the last minute when they can charge visitors from Denver and Charlotte a lot more than they can today.

And if they haven't thought about that, then they can thank their humble columnist for bringing this wonderful opportunity to their attention.

Colleges You Ought to Know

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

What makes a "good" college? Sometimes it's a school that has a familiar name. But often times it isn't. Students who are beginning their very first college search should keep in mind that some very "good" colleges are ones they have never heard of before.

In Northern California we are blessed to have several very fine and very well-known research universities, among them Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley. These schools enroll some of the brightest minds in the world. But these are also among the most difficult places to gain admission. Last year Stanford accepted only five percent of the students for its incoming freshman Class of 2016. Berkeley accepted only 16 percent. Each year acceptance rates to selective colleges decline, the number of applicants rises, while the number of available seats in a freshman class does not. Hence the frenzy related to selective college admissions.

One key sign of a "good" college is their four-year graduation rate. Last year Stanford reported that 76 percent of students who entered in 2010 graduated within four years. UC Berkeley's graduation rate was 72 percent, UCLA's was 69 percent and Davis only graduated 51 percent within four years. Why use this indicator? Because, in my humble opinion, the four-year graduation rate is the best measure of how well colleges do their job. Interestingly, there are many schools that, while less selective, do at least as well as Stanford at graduating a freshman class. One example is a public university: the University of Virginia. This school took 30 percent of its applicants last year and had a better graduation rate than Stanford, Cal and each of the other UC campuses. Eighty-seven percent of its

2010 freshman class graduated on time. It even beat Harvard (86 percent) – but only by a smidgen!

This example helps show that selectivity only measures demand for seats in the freshman class, and selectivity may not always directly correlate with the quality of the education that a college offers, or how well that school retains and graduates the students they accept. Higher education is the only service business that is rated in part by the percentage of potential customers who do not get to use it. I doubt that you read of banks or hospitals that are considered the best because they turn more customers away. Service businesses are highly regarded when they provide superior customer service, which strong colleges do for their students and alumni, giving them a good education and graduating them on time. This includes helping them to set academic and career directions early in their college years, and providing opportunities to test those directions both in the classroom and through experiences and internships beyond coursework. It also means building and supporting a strong professional network that will be there for the rest of their graduates' lives.

There are many good colleges in the U.S. that offer as much for their students as Stanford, UC Berkeley and the University of Virginia. Their names are less familiar to college-bound students and families because they are in less popular locations. As a college advisor I often feel that the U.S. is very small indeed – students who are willing to explore new places outside of California are in a far more advantageous position from an admissions perspective than their peers who wish to stay with familiar and well known places like San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Boston.

Other good colleges may be less well known because they have smaller student bodies, or more regional alumni bases. They might have lower profiles because their football or basketball teams are not covered by the national media or their faculty is not always quoted for breaking news stories. But these good colleges do accept a larger percentage of the students who are interested in joining their freshman class. And the best news is that those who take advantage of the resources provided by these schools can reap the same or even better rewards had they gone to one of the 'elite' schools.

This year I will tell you about a few of these schools. Some are small liberal arts colleges, others larger and more comprehensive universities, offering undergraduate and advanced degrees as well. Some may be in places you know and others in places that might be unfamiliar. But all of them do what a good college is supposed to do.



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an independent college advisor who draws upon 25 years of higher education experience to help guide and support the college admissions process for students and their families. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC and HECA. She can be contacted at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com. Visit www.doingcollege.com for more information about her services.