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# Orinda Mom's Accidental Culinary Successes

By Diane Claytor

Sitting across the table from Sharon McGinnis Girdlestone, eyeing her flawless skin, beautiful long blonde hair, and fashionable outfit, it's easy to guess that she's a model. Once she starts talking with her lilted voice and English accent, thoughts shift; maybe she's an actor. When she says she spent many years working as a fashion designer, a bulb goes off; now that makes sense. But when the Orinda resident explains what she does now — and how she accidentally fell into her job — surprise sets in. She certainly doesn't look like a cook or the successful owner of My Sustainable Table.

Born in Northern England, Girdlestone's family moved to Southern California when she was a teenager. In 2005, she moved back to England "so I could see what it was like to live in my home country as an adult," she explains. It appears to have been a wise decision; she met a handsome Englishman, married him and had their first son, Lennon, there. Three years later, Girdlestone says, "we returned to California because I wanted to be back in the sunshine." With family still in Southern California, that was their first choice; but a job transfer to the Bay Area sealed the deal.

At 4-years-old, Lennon made a request: he wanted a dragon cake. "I had no idea where to get one," Girdlestone remembers. "I had never made a cake in my life. But I figured I had two days, my sister could help and I'd just do it. I made an unbelievable mess," but the end result, she said, was a huge, bright green dye-filled cake that everyone loved. People started talking about this incredible cake, sharing pictures on social media and soon she was getting orders for custom cakes.

Girdlestone insists she was never a cook. In fact, she said with a smile, her husband would say she was a terrible baker. "I made him muffins once that were as hard as rocks and tasted like salt," she claims. But with orders for her custom cakes increasing, she obtained a cottage license, formed Lovely Little Cakes, and baked up to 10 custom cakes per week from her home kitchen.

Believing that some behavioral issues could be the result of food dyes, Girdlestone, who acknowledges that Lennon's dragon

cake was anything but healthy, began teaching herself about healthy foods. She researched everything she could and learned about baking cakes with no gluten, dyes, casein or refined sugar. And the orders kept coming.

Soon requests for healthier meals started coming in. "There was one woman who asked me to make a paleo lunch every day for her family of six. Then she wanted paleo dinners," Girdlestone says. Again, a simple plan snowballed and more and more people began asking for healthy meals. "I absolutely hadn't planned on doing this," Girdlestone states unequivocally. But again, she did her homework, consulted with a nutritionist, learned "everything I could about healthy eating and then just went for it."

She rented space in a commercial kitchen and launched My Sustainable Table, delivering good-for-you meals throughout Lamorinda and, by affiliating with other healthy food providers, beyond the immediate area.

Every meal Girdlestone produces is clean and wholesome. All ingredients are locally sourced, seasonal, organic, gluten and GMO free. There's something for every diet, Girdlestone says proudly. "It's clean eating all the way. There's absolutely no rubbish." She creates her own menus and develops her own recipes. A glance at her website is enough to make any mouth water. Meals offered during a week in early June included organic plum, chia almond flour muffins, gluten free caprese, turkey quinoa bake, organic dill sauerkraut; organic basil and cashew chicken, and coconut macaroon almond granola. My Sustainable Table caters



Sharon McGinnis Girdlestone and her helpers, Lennon (left) and Finn (right) Girdlestone and Sage Balducci pick fruit for muffins baked for My Sustainable Table.  
Photo Jennifer Balducci

approximately 200 meals per week. And Girdlestone does it all. She has one helper and between the two of them, food is purchased, chopped, prepped, cooked, individually packaged and readied for pick up and delivery. And she still bakes approximately three healthier custom cakes every week, although these she typically makes at home so "I can see my family; so they know who I am," she said laughingly.

Like most young kids, her two boys want to eat junk food. They once told her she was a "mean, horrible mommy because I was making them eat gluten-free," Girdlestone admits. "I just teach them and hope they'll remember what's good for them."

An avid supporter of the Bay Area Crisis Nursery, Girdlestone donates a percentage of her profits to the organization.

Girdlestone can't help laughing at herself, admitting that her

"accidental career" story is hilarious. "I never cooked. I never baked. And here I am with two businesses. I love what I do and feel great because I know that I'm helping people eat healthier. What we put in our bodies matters."



Plum paleo muffins baked by Sharon McGinnis Girdlestone for My Sustainable Table.

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

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## As Seen in Lamorinda What's in 'a' Truck?



Raymundo Reyes delivers for Amazon Photo Sophie Braccini

Raymundo Reyes is a hard worker. The 63-year-old man works for Amazon, delivering small- and medium-sized packages to the Lamorinda area and beyond. He says he could work up to 60 hours a week but works only 50. A conscientious driver, he turns off the engine of his small white truck with the famous "a" emblazoned on one side, for security reasons, he says, every time he delivers a package.

The distribution center is located in San Ramon and deliveries in Amazon trucks in Lamorinda started three months ago, according to Reyes. — S. Braccini

## Business Bites

Compiled by Vic Ryerson

Venture Quality Goods honored at Annual Small Business Awards Luncheon



Rosylyn and Tom Stenzel in front of their store

Photo A. Scheck

Tom and Rosylyn Stenzel, owners of Venture, a men's and women's clothing store they started during the recession, were honored May 6 at a luncheon, along with recipients of this award from other cities in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. The event was hosted by the East Bay Leadership Council.

Venture offers quality clothing produced here in California. Tom Stenzel's years of experience in the apparel industry (including a long gig with Levi Strauss) helped him understand their target audience, and the Stenzels have been creative in their marketing, embracing many non-traditional ways to appeal to the community. Their efforts have paid off, as they have beat the odds of starting the business at a risky time.

### Moraga Country Club's Joel Dantoc Named June Employee of the Month

Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce will honor Joel Dantoc, a food server and bartender at Moraga Country Club, as Moraga's June Employee of the Month. He will be presented with his award, as well as with gift cards for Moraga's Safeway and Pennini's Restaurant, at the Moraga Rotary lunch at Saint Mary's College on July 19.

Dantoc has been serving MCC patrons for the past 12 years, consistently receiving solid reviews from customers and co-workers alike. MCC General Manager Andrew Scott describes him as "a true team player," offering to work longer shifts or extra days when necessary. "He does whatever job ... needs to be done."



From left: Wendy Schreck, Moraga Chamber President, Angie Rosenberry, Moraga Country Club Food & Beverage Manager, Joel Dantoc, Roger Gregory, Moraga Rotary President  
Photo Kevin Reneau

### Fitbody Boot Camp

Moraga's latest entrant into the local fitness scene is Fitbody Boot Camp, which has taken over Karate Fitness USA's space in Moraga Shopping Center. A nationwide franchised fitness business with locations elsewhere in California, Fitbody Boot Camp offers a fitness and fat loss workout program emphasizing 30 minute High-intensity Interval Training (HIIT) sessions conducted by certified trainers in a group setting.

Further information is available at (925) 794-6048 or info@fitbody-moraga.com.

### From the Three Chambers

#### Lafayette Chamber of Commerce

www.lafayettechamber.org (925) 284-7404

The Lamorinda Small Business Forum will present Protecting Your Business -- Robbery/Recovery/Emergency on Thursday, July 14, 5:30 – 7 p.m., at the Bank of the West Lafayette Branch, 3583 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. The program is open to all businesses throughout Lamorinda.

#### Moraga Chamber of Commerce

www.moragachamber.org (925) 323-6524

#### Orinda Chamber of Commerce

www.orindachamber.org (925) 254-3909

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