

In Focus: Jim Marggraff

Local man to judge at the Entrepreneur of the Year Awards

By Pippa Fisher



Jim Marggraff Photo provided

This year one of the judges at the prestigious Ernst and Young's Entrepreneur of the Year Awards program will be Lafayette resident Jim Marggraff.

The awards program, now in its 31st year, seeks entrepreneurial and innovative leaders who will be shaping the future through their vision. The program gives nominees the chance to compete at a regional level and go on to national and global levels. The Northern California program is one of more than 145 cities in more than 60 countries.

Every year the awards feature an independent panel of judges selected from both prior award winners and prominent industry leaders. Marggraff is no exception, having won the Northern California EY Entrepreneur of the Year award himself in 2011. He is in good company – other winners from the area include Starbucks Coffee Company, LinkedIn, FitBit, Google, GoPro, Earthbound Farm, Stella & Dot, Medivation and Shut-fly.

Marggraff, whose innovations have long been covered by the media including the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, CNN,

Good Morning America and Business Week among many more, has been developing technology and products to create solutions and improve learning for over 25 years.

From 1999-2010 Marggraff received hundreds of awards from around the world, most notably with his company, LeapFrog, for LeapPads – his educational toy, which earned the Toy of the Year award. It was during his seven years at LeapFrog that he developed his idea for a smartpen and went on to found Livescribe.

Never one to let the grass grow under his feet, Marggraff founded Eyefluence in 2013, developing technology that transforms intent into action through the user's eyes. He sold Eyefluence in 2016 to Google and is now a Director of Product Management at Google.

Marggraff says that the Entrepreneur of the Year award recognizes those who demonstrate excellent and extraordinary success in areas such as financial performance, innovation and commitment to their businesses and communities is what makes it the world's most prestigious business award for entrepreneurship.

He continues, "We are looking for entrepreneurs who demonstrate business savvy, financial acumen, leadership, high integrity, and evidence of success — and who will become the role models of future entrepreneurs."

He notes that the superb pool of nominees provides his biggest challenge and says that he has to merge insights from his own experience with guidance for the attributes specified by Ernst and Young to select the most outstanding entrepreneurs. "I am impressed by the overall quality and range of

businesses represented by the nominees."

Clearly a true entrepreneur has an exceptional drive to succeed. When asked if he sought to invent and create as a child, Marggraff replied that, as a child of a single parent with no college education, he was driven to find ways to augment the family income by delivering newspapers, selling Christmas cards and seeds and hosting neighborhood raffles but he says, "I enjoyed creating media – recording and splicing sounds and interviews, electronics and programming on a clunky teletype with paper tape."

Longtime Lafayette residents Marggraff and his wife have lived in Lafayette since 1998. They have two children, both of whom went through Acalanes High School. Their son, Blake, now 24, has just started his second company, EPharmix, and their daughter, Annie, attends Washington University in St. Louis.

He and his wife have encouraged their children through their actions and by engaging them in their own activities wherever possible. Marggraff says that both children visited LeapFrog weekly for years while he worked there to record their voices for characters in the LeapPad Learning System.

Their encouragement worked. In his senior year of high school Blake won the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair Gordon E. Moore award for a breakthrough treatment for cancer with his classmate Matt Feddersen.

Annie, after much research, set up a running club during high school for autistic students, a program that led to "Bear Cubs" running club for autistic students at Washington University – a pro-

gram she is currently working on taking nationwide.

However, Marggraff also credits his local schools, which he said encouraged his children too. He particularly credits Acalanes science teacher Jay Chugh who he said "cleared a path for them (Blake and Matt) to explore and invent – and represent Lamorinda on a global stage."

Marggraff continues, "Schools are only as good as the support of their parents and communities. I have met with and supported principals and teachers of many of our Lamorinda schools for discussions about the LeapPad and the Livescribe smartpen (that I had created). The energy, enthusiasm, and commitment of the staff with whom I have met, to our students' future, are extraordinary."

Marggraff is a member of the Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club. He and his entire family have spoken on multiple occasions sharing their passions, projects and developments. He loves the extraordinarily positive community support in Lafayette. "People in our community step up to challenges and opportunities, both local or global."

Explaining what inspires him he says, "I am energized by developing a breakthrough technology to meet a critical need for our society and then building a team and solution that will positively impact the world."

The Entrepreneur of the Year Awards nominees are arguably already winners, gaining as they surely will from the perspective and wisdom of Marggraff's involvement.

A new look for the 11th annual Moraga Community Faire

By Sophie Braccini



Local artist Jaya Griggs will again offer pet portraits Photo Andy Scheck

For 10 years now Ellen Beans had been the Moraga Chamber of Commerce's Community Faire leader. Now, the former Citizen of the Year decided that a decade was enough and passed the baton. It took two co-chairs to fill her shoes: Ashley Louisiana and Ian Cook represent the new generation of Moraga movers and doers who took on the challenge, supported by an experienced team of volunteers.

They are producing an event on May 13 that will be more condensed and integrated for additional interaction between visitors, vendors and the car show. They are also introducing novelties such as pony rides for kids.

Even if the layout and feel will be changed, residents will find at the fair many of the elements that have made this regional event — it attracts some 2,000 people. A Kid's Zone, live entertainment, food trucks, local wine, classic cars and all sorts of fun booths is what make the event "an old fashion neighborhood fair for the whole family," they say.

The co-chairs note that this event is the best chance for the local businesses, small and large, to show off and really interface with the residents, while providing local entertainment and fun.

"There are so many resources

here in town that many of us can overlook from time to time," says Cook. He adds that everything from the signs being printed, to the kids' activities like the bounce houses and balloon animals, are produced and provided by Moraga residents and chamber of commerce members. The entire entertainment lineup of bands, dancers, and performers is also local. Among the day's highlights will be performances from the Saint Mary's Jazz Band and the Campolindo High School band, as well as a presentation by CAPA dancers.

"All in all, it is really a time for the community to come together and shine, and that sense of pride in community is really why we all do it," says Cook.

Because Louisiana, Cook and the team noticed that there really are some fascinating and exciting cars on display during the car show, they rethought the fair design to integrate that part of the fair better, and this year, there will also be a car parade at the conclusion of the car show. The cars will circle the fair in an exit formation that should make for quite a demonstration. "It is one thing to look at the cars in the lot, but to hear them all fire up and circle the fair will be exciting," says Cook.

Even if the fair is celebrating old

cars, it will also do its part to limit the environmental footprint and encourage folks to ride their bikes to the Rheem Valley Shopping Center where it will take place again this year. Bike valet will be provided, so that people do not have to worry about finding a good spot to lock up their bikes for the day. The Moraga Police Department will be providing a bicycle safety course, as well as inspecting bikes to make sure that they are safe to ride.

A good fair needs food and beverages, and food trucks will be selling snacks or quick lunch items such as sliders filled with 100 percent grass-fed beef. Adult beverage booths served under the trees will offer beer and a variety of wines made by local wineries. Artists' wares, craft food items, and local businesses and organizations will be featured in booths throughout the fair.

Louisiana is on the board of the Moraga chamber of commerce and is Waste Prevention and Recycling Manager for Recycle Smart. She has attended the event as a vendor for close to 10 years and joined the committee about four years ago to oversee the recycling, organics and landfill services. She remembers how Beans and the fair were one of the first events in the entire service area requesting organic food scrap collection.

Cook started as a vendor and sponsor while working with the Moraga Country Club, then got more involved with the chamber of commerce and began set-up/take-down and various other volunteer roles. Cook is director, new business and operations for MedMatrX.

"We plan to honor Ellen (Beans) and her work in the community and the fair by having her ride in a convertible in front of the car parade," says Louisiana. The Moraga Community Faire & Car Show will be held from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, May 13 at the town's Rheem Valley Shopping Center.

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