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Long road back for many businesses wiped out by Lafayette fire

By Nick Marnell

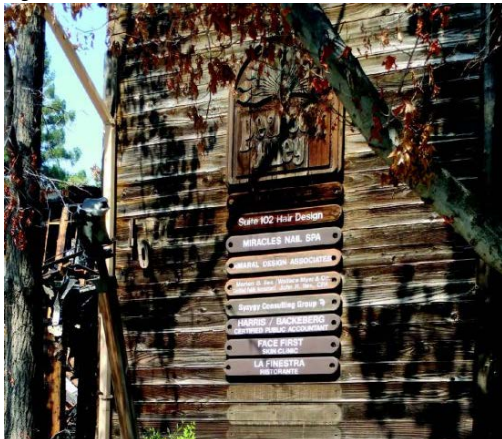


Photo Nick Marnell

The Lafayette Circle businesses destroyed by the July 13 fire have regrouped with varying degrees of success as of the beginning of September.

Marta Chavalas of Skincare by Marta moved into the Lafayette Beauty Store and Salon on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, a temporary stop until she finds her new home. "It's been very difficult for me," she said, as her business requires water, sinks and special flooring. "No carpets," Chavalas said.

According to Jay Lifson, executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, Marion Iles moved her accounting business to Walnut Creek, as did Brad Backeberg. "The therapists have found new places and Kelly of Studio 102 Hair Design moved into a spot across from the Lafayette Library with two of her employees," Lifson said. Paul the Tutor landed a new location on Old Tunnel Road.

The owner of La Finestra restaurant said he is tantalizingly close to a new site for his business. "We are negotiating on a couple of properties in Lafayette," Jeff Assadi said. He initially checked out and rejected the Artisan Bistro location, because the building needed to come up to Americans with Disabilities Act standards and the landlord refused to help with any leasehold improvements.

"By the end of September, we definitely plan to reopen. We will be thrilled to serve Lafayette again," Assadi said. Insurance covered two months of wages for his employees, and Assadi said he expects all of his employees to return.

The Chamber of Commerce is close to securing a new permanent location as well, but Lifson said he could not yet comment on the targeted site, only that it was near the previous Lafayette Circle Chamber offices.

Sereta Churchill, Lafayette Community Foundation board member, said the foundation has sent information to each of the affected businesses so they can apply for community foundation grant funding.

(Note: Many of the business listed in the photo moved out of Lafayette Circle long before the July fire.)

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