

To Lamorinda singles over 40: There's hope!

By Nick Marnell



Lori Fowler and John George enjoy the fun at the Nov. 7 Lamorinda singles event Photo Nick Marnell

World Series over. No Sharks game. No Warriors game. Still plenty of time to procrastinate writing my own articles for the paper. It was Tuesday night and I had nothing to do, so I went to dinner at Rancho Cantina on Mt. Diablo Boulevard in Lafayette.

The place was mobbed! The first Tuesday in November, and not just mobbed, but buzzing. Three dozen-plus people drinking and talking and laughing and forcing me to sit at the counter. Co-owner Julie Mitchell walked over to me and explained: Her bar-restaurant was hosting a singles event, put together by the irrepressible Kim Thanh, a Lafayette commercial banker.

"Lafayette is so boring. It's so hard to be single in the suburbs," Thanh said, as smiling and upbeat and positive as one would expect of an event planner. So Thanh reached out on Nextdoor, a pri-

vate neighborhood social network, and organized the Nov. 7 get-together. She promoted a singles event at Metro a month earlier, which drew only 10 people, albeit with a suggested age range of 28-48. The event at Rancho Cantina buried the earlier one: Rancho was promoted as a 40-65 event. And did the 40-65 singles respond.

"Way better than I thought it would be," said Cyndy Ayers of Saranap. "It's great to meet with people who have something in common from the same area."

Kristi Buckley of Lafayette, who works for an architectural firm in San Francisco, praised the turnout. "We need this. It's so hard to meet people in our city," Buckley said.

A faithful reader of our paper offered her special take to the evening. "Widows and widowers have no organization," said Lori

Fowler of Lafayette, a widow herself. "People assume events for widows are for people only in their 80s. There are plenty of us in their 50s too," Fowler said. John George, a retired widower, agreed. "I've lived two and a half years in Lafayette, and I didn't think there were any singles here," George said.

About the only professed negative was the gender mix, as proclaimed by one attendee who wished to remain anonymous, who said the men didn't have the guts to show up. The turnout was 75 percent female. (I was working, so I didn't count.)

Thanh and Mitchell plan to host a similar event for the 40-65 age group on the first Tuesday evening of each month. No official title, still a work in progress.

And guys: On Dec. 5, there are no Warriors or Sharks games on television.

Classic manners being taught in the classroom

By Cathy Dausman



One student works on a thank you card. Photos Cathy Dausman



Tina Hayes discusses proper utensil use.

Can behavioral rules established 400 years ago in France's Louis XIV court possibly be relevant today? Just ask the kindergartners and fifth-graders taking Tina Hayes's etiquette classes. Those students might not ex-

pect to be addressed as "beautiful young ladies and gents" (in fact, the sobriquet elicited a round of giggling from the fifth-grade girls) but they have learned how their manners, both good and bad, reflect on their family.

In a world of instant gratification and self-importance, teaching classic etiquette may be a hard sell, but Hayes believes starting at a young age is the key to doing things right.

Hayes was at Husky House, a year-round school held on the Happy Valley Elementary School campus, to develop another group of good citizens. She has been at this location for four years and in business as founder and owner of The School of Etiquette and Decorum in Northern California for the last 10.

After 20 years in corporate management Hayes realized that if she was intimidated about making manners missteps in business settings, it made sense to train others to avoid making similar mistakes. After all, she reminds her charges, each student represents his or her family to the outside world.

The class begins with hats (and one Halloween mustache) doffed, students sitting upright, making proper eye contact and responding with a pleasant "good afternoon, Miss Hayes!"

The art of the handshake is broken into six steps (use your right hand, lock thumbs, make eye contact, smile, pump hands three times and include a verbal greeting) and table manners are dissected, from napkin selection (better restaurants will offer black or white, to minimize lint on clothing) to its proper placement during and after a meal (never on the chair seat!), and how to set a proper place.

The speed-setting contest near the end of the fifth-grade class was a challenge – not because the students hadn't mastered where each knife, fork and spoon was placed, but because they also needed to be well mannered throughout the event itself.

Hayes also explains, humorously, why burping, using a toothpick at the table or using your napkin as a bib won't do.

"She (Hayes) is doing a fantastic job. It is a charming class," said Anne Reardon, Husky House executive director. Reardon says it helps create all around citizens "the old school way."

And for that, a thank you note is due.

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