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Roden, Taverna Pellegrini win Orinda business awards

By Sora O'Doherty



Photos Sora O'Doherty

Roden and her husband, who had just retired from Chevron, decided that the time was right and they bought the local bookstore.

Roden loves books and is delighted at the store's big, open space, which she uses for a multiplicity of purposes. She actively supports local artists by showcasing their work. There is an art reception once a month, and one wall of the store is dedicated to local art. A glass showcase displays the work of jewelry artists. Patrons of the Blue Egg Farm can order online and pick up their fresh organic vegetables, herbs, flowers, fruit, seedlings, and blue eggs from the bookstore. Orinda Books is open seven days a week, opening each day at 10 a.m. and closing weekdays at 6, Saturdays at 5 and Sundays at 3, unless there is a special event.

"People thought I was crazy when I bought the bookstore," Roden says, but the bookstore is profitable and fun. "Orinda is a community that wants to keep its bookstore," she notes. Roden purchases all the adult books. She has a "fabulous staff," she says - all local, all well read. The bookkeeper has been with the store for 30 years. Schools buy books from Orinda Books, as does the Orinda Library. In turn, Roden donates to the school the proceeds from an innovative project. The store receives a lot of books for review that cannot be sold per se. The books are wrapped in plain paper, and a staff member writes a little blurb about what the book is about. Patrons of the store are free to take a book and donate whatever they wish. The proceeds, which can be as much as \$100 to \$200 a month, are donated to the schools or other organizations.

Taverna Pellegrini proprietor Dario Hadjan was born in Iran, but left when he was 14 years old to attend boarding school in Italy. The school, St. Mary's, was located in Lago Maggiore, but is no longer there. From there he went on to the American University of Rome, where he earned a business degree. Always good with people, Hadjan was a DJ in college at a local nightclub in Rome. He came to the States in 1988. After trying several places in California, south and north, he settled in the Bay Area and opened a few Italian restaurants: Pane e Vino, which he says was one of the most successful restaurants in San Francisco, Tiramisu, and Caffè delle Stelle. Hadjan currently runs Piazza Pellegrini in San Francisco and Taverna Pellegrini, which is the winner of the Business of the Year award. The restaurant features a wood-burning oven that Hadjan says would be the envy of every chef in Naples!

With the two restaurants, Hadjan says he works eight days a week. "I say, 'I have two wives, and many children,'" says Hadjan, who is single. All of his chefs work with him creating new items and keeping the menu up to date. At least once a year Hadjan travels to Italy, where he has many friends. His favorite trip is to drive from Rome, up the coast of Italy to Lago Maggiore, the crossing over and returning on the opposite coast.

Active in the community, Hadjan sponsors a baseball team in Orinda. Taverna Pellegrini, opened in 2015, features happy hour from 3 to 6 p.m., with early dinner from 4 to 6 p.m. and dinner continuing to be served until 10 p.m.

The May 8 all-inclusive awards dinner costs \$35. Reservations are required and can be made on the chamber of commerce website: www.orindachamber.org.

Both the Orinda Business Person of the Year, Maria Roden of Orinda Books, and the proprietor of the Orinda Business of the Year, Dario Hadjan of Taverna Pellegrini, are immigrants who have found success in Orinda and both will be honored at the annual Orinda Business Awards Dinner on May 8 from 5 to 7:30 p.m. This year the dinner will be at the Taverna Pellegrini, so those attending will get a real taste of the winner's accomplishments.

Roden of Orinda Books was brought up in England, but moved to the States 21 years ago when her husband's job brought them here. They have three children, now 30, 26 and 21. The youngest was just 6 months old when they made the move. When her children were grown, Maria went to work for Orinda Books. When the owner decided that it was time to retire after 37 years in business, Roden and her husband, who had just retired



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