

Baagan vegan restaurant opens in Moraga

By Jenn Freedman



Photo provided

Baagan, an Indian-inspired vegan restaurant, opened in the Rheem Shopping Center in mid-November in the space previously occupied by New Delhi Bistro. “Eat the Way Nature Intended” is Baagan’s slogan; the menu offers organic, healthy, plant-based meals like burgers, salads, teas, and more. The food is all handmade and sourced from local farmers and businesses.

Owner Rajbir Randhawa decided to open the Moraga location after listening to her customers at the Baagan food truck at the Moraga farmers’ market persistently

ask, “When are you going to open a storefront in Moraga? We want the option to eat this food every day, not just on Sundays!” So when the prospect arose to move in permanently, she and manager Roos Pal jumped on the opportunity.

Baagan offers a variety of burgers using its two signature patties: the chana (chickpea) patty and the mung patty are both packed with veggies, seeds, and therapeutic spices. My personal favorite is the spicy mung burger, satisfying and beautifully served with cashew herbal cheese, arugula, pickled onion, jalapenos, cucumber and

tomato. Another popular choice is the mushroom chana burger, served with garlic mushrooms, cashew herbal cheese, and a rainbow of veggies. Burgers can be served on a bun or with two side salads. Consider adding a side order of fries with the luscious, “creamy” lime cilantro sauce (made with cashew cream).

Baagan offers four seasonal salads daily, which can be mixed and matched. Current highlights include the kale ribbon salad in “honey” mustard (using agave nectar to sweeten) with pomegranate seeds and persimmons and the sautéed beets with mustard seeds and Himalayan salt. Baagan also offers a seasonal soup, currently a simple yet delectable butternut squash. A unique must-try is the veggie potato cakes side dish served with a delightful tangy tamarind sauce.

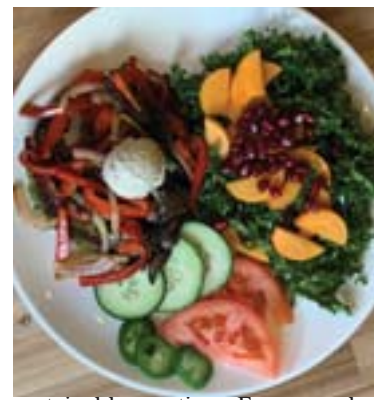
Baagan also offers dessert options, all gluten-free. For a nostalgic and healthy bite, try the raw chocolate chip cookie dough bites (approved by my kids) or the turmeric donut holes. More decadent

options include raw blackberry cheesecake and tiramisu cheesecake – both made with cashew cream.

The restaurant specializes in a variety of healthful beverages as well. Baagan formulates signature Ayurvedic (an ancient holistic healing system developed in India) teas like the gingery Immunity Booster. Nourishing, hot creamy lattes are perfect to beat the winter chill: the Peaceful Panda with matcha green tea, ginger and cashew milk is decadently warming, or for a decaf option try the Golden Warrior made with turmeric, cardamom and cashew milk. Baagan also offers cold fusions, like the refreshing blackberry sage lemonade and iced herbal tea.

The restaurant is focused on clean, healthy food; everything is free of preservatives, dairy, GMOs, soy, peanut and palm oil, and most items are gluten-free. In addition, Baagan uses low glycemic index sweeteners like coconut sugar and agave nectar.

The restaurant also maintains



sustainable practices. For example, it uses biodegradable containers and utensils for to-go orders and does not have straws. The staff also shops at the local Moraga farmers’ market for at least 25 percent of the produce.

The Moraga location is the second brick-and-mortar restaurant; the first is in San Ramon. The food truck is currently parked while the team focuses on the new Moraga restaurant.

Baagan is open daily, Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Saint Mary’s business students

The MOU gave Puri the opportunity to apply for a 48-unit residential project in the theatre’s vicinity and subdivide the parcel for other uses. Puri agreed to keep the rent at \$5,000 until transfer of ownership to MCF.

As the dust temporarily settled, Rheem Theatre reopened its doors in June 2018, with sellout shows its first weekend. However, ticket sales once again began to dwindle.

With the goal of making the Rheem Theatre’s problems a thing of the past, SMC professor Aponte-Moreno tasked his students to find a feasible business solution.

He provided them with the theatre’s history, a summarized income statement for 2017 and background information on the movie theatre industry as a whole. Essential demographics of Moraga, surrounding communities and SMC were also given, along with in-class visits from many town representatives to provide expert advice to the students.

The teams were expected to conduct a thorough analysis of the industry, the market and the business by coming up with an overall 10-year strategy, a profitability estimate and a short business plan.

The competition essentially began at the start of the new school year in September with the introduction of the case and team se-

lections. Interviews and a tour of Rheem Theatre went into October. Research and development continued through November, along with a written strategy plan and executive summary.

Even though bragging rights to solving the Rheem Theatre’s financial woes should be enough of a prize, a cash scholarship award totaling \$10,000 provided by the Chamber was distributed to the top three teams: First Place \$5,000; Second Place \$3,500; Third Place \$1,500.

SMC Associate Dean Larisa Genin and BUSAD Program Director Mary Alice McNeil had been working with town representatives since the competition was announced. Genin, having had experience with prior case studies, gratefully acknowledged “the generosity of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce,” and the efforts of chamber president Bob Fritzky and its executive director, Kathe Nelson, “for providing scholarship money to our students.”

Aponte-Moreno stated, “I’m amazed at the opportunity for my class to do an actual case with hands-on simulation. It was great to get to know the town and its expectations.” He added, “The winning strategies will be applied and the students are very excited.”

Fritzky said, “I’d like to have

this type of challenge annually in Moraga.”

The five competing teams were: TEAM 1: Lauren Overstreet, Hunter Tully, Ricardo Santos, David Bortins (coached by Lawrence Souza, faculty, Finance Dept); TEAM 2: Lilia Corral, Kelsey Wise, Jonathan Cortes, Daniel Hernandez (coached by Michael Alderete, Corporate Fellow & Executive Coach); TEAM 3: Asher Finkelstein, Christian Houser, Tyler O’Campo, Luke Sanchez (coached by Brent Meyers, Managing Partner, Competitive Dynamics); TEAM 4: Leah Emerson, Lourdes Hess, Jonathan Chan, Jeremiah Michael (coached by Michael Alderete), and TEAM 5: Neylene Leon, Gerardo Reyes, Justine Roman, Kevin Sudduth, Kendal Vargas (coached by Lawrence Souza).

There were 12 judges from all walks in the business community: Moraga Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg; East Bay Leadership Council CEO Kristin Connelly; Tailor Brands CEO Doug Ewert; Semifreddi’s CEO Tom Frainger; Wells Fargo Northern California Retail Banking President Peter Gruebele; PGIM Real Estate CEO Tim Hennessey; ESPN sports marketing senior director Bruce Kalfus; Compass Residential - Olsen Team CEO Ben Olson; Moraga Community Foundation president

Tom Schnurr; Next Move CEO Shari Simon; and Derek Zemrak, operator, Rheem Theatre.

The teams were judged on competitive advantage, market need, potential for success, financial needs and presentation.

Recommendations by TEAM 1 were to create a membership program, offer \$6 Student Mondays, \$5 Super Tuesdays for all customers, create an internship program with SMC, offer unique live events, have a bar/café and an arcade.

TEAM 2 recommended partnering with local schools in hosting live events, offer a speaker series, Senior Bingo Night, private screenings, magic shows, stand-up comedy, serve hot food (hot dogs, fries and nachos), vintage arcade games and monthly membership/discount cards.

Offerings from TEAM 3 were to have Foosball/Ping-Pong tables in the lobby, \$5 Student Tuesdays, family-oriented bundling deals, incentives for free concessions/tickets and take advantage of the free advertising available through social media.

TEAM 4 wanted more partnering with SMC by having college events take place at the theatre and offer an eSports arena (multi-player video competitions) for games in the smaller theatres upstairs.

Suggestions by TEAM 5 included updating the theatre website, offer on-screen advertising

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before/in between screenings, open the outside ticket booth, redecorate, serve higher quality food and beverages, book concerts that will draw 300-500 patrons, have VIP seating and turn the theatre into a restaurant/entertainment center.

After each team’s timed presentation the judges were allowed a question and answer period. While praise for the students’ efforts was in abundance, many, if not all, of the questions boiled down to money. The cost of expenses verses profits.

Once all of the team presentations were concluded, the judges were sequestered while the points were tabulated and the winners announced. TEAM 3 took third place, dividing \$1,500, TEAM 1 took second with \$3,500, and the first place winners, dividing \$5,000, went to TEAM 4.

Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter and Saint Mary’s College Provost Margaret Kasimatis presented the larger-than-life sized checks to each of the winning teams.

When members of the winning TEAM 4 were asked for comment, the stunned recipients replied, “Feeling great!” and “So excited!”

Derek Zemrak, Rheem Theatre’s operator, was looking forward to utilizing many of the ideas presented during the competition. “It was interesting and beneficial.”

Critter Tree tradition continues at Moraga Library

“We try to reuse them every year, and sometimes I have to refurbish them beforehand.”

Another club member, Phyllis Reed, came equipped with her trea-

sured copy of “Brandywine Critters – Nature’s Crafts from a Brandywine Christmas” by volunteers of the Brandywine River Museum, Brandywine Conservancy. The

small hardcover book is packed with “how to” advice, pictures and “recipes” for creating a critter ornament for those whose imaginations need a little nudge.

The ladies admitted to feeling a bit intimidated at creating a recognizable critter, but eventually got into the spirit of the occasion and were thrilled with their results. The

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tree displays a myriad of imaginative efforts, and just when it seems that each critter has been identified, suddenly a new ornament is discovered, as if by magic.

Moraga police remind residents to be aware of scammers

If you give them access to your computer they will diagnose non-existent problems and charge you. The FTC says, “If you get an unexpected pop-up, call, spam email or other urgent message about problems with your computer, stop. Don’t click on any links, don’t give control of your computer and don’t send any money.”

Scammers are also counting on our fear of the IRS (www.irs.gov). You may get a call demanding immediate payment using a specific payment method such as a prepaid debit card, credit card or wire transfer. They may threaten to involve law enforcement to have you arrested for non-payment. The IRS wants consumers to know that,

“Generally, the IRS will first mail you a bill if you owe any taxes.”

Using the telephone for scamming has not gone out of style. A longtime tried and true scam is the, “Help me, Grandma! I’m in jail and need bail money!” scam. The person calling may also claim to be in the hospital or stuck in Europe. In any case, they’re not going

anywhere and this gives you the opportunity to do some investigating. Before you do, get your “relative’s” contact number and call other relatives to verify the story. According to MPD, “If they are truly in trouble, that is when families come together to help each other.”

The most important advice to

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potential scam victims is not to panic, don’t be bullied into providing information and always do your own independent investigation before relinquishing personal information to strangers.

If you have any questions or think you may have been scammed, contact the Moraga Police Department at (925) 888-7055.

Orinda mom takes over District 16 California Assembly seat

“Every department that supports the legislature comes and gives presentations to the new members,” she said. Her favorite was the 80 lawyers who assist the legislature in writing bills. “I think that is so valuable,” she said, “because it removes lobbyists from bill drafting.”

Bauer-Kahan has stepped into the shoes of the former Assemblywoman Catharine Baker, taking over the District 16 office in San Ramon and her office in the state capital, both of which are state-funded. Bauer-Kahan, who has lived in Orinda since relocating from Oakland in 2011 and who is

in the process of hiring her team, will continue to live in Orinda, commuting to Sacramento daily when the legislature is in term from January to mid-June and August through September.

The new representative is committed to local control, and hopes to hear from her constituents their ideas on how to make things work better, like BART parking or solving the housing crisis, because she says it is the locals who understand the challenges faced by their particular location. For example, she points out, the city of Dublin has grown 30 percent in the last few years. That kind of growth makes

it difficult for local services, such as schools, to keep up.

Bauer-Kahan acknowledges that she is representing a diverse district, but she believes that her constituents share similar values, such as environmental impact. For example, she points out that fire protection is so crucial because of its obvious threat to lives and homes, but also because California fires have the biggest impact on climate change. It’s a vicious cycle, she acknowledges: climate change causes the fires, which then intensify climate change.

Among her other priorities are school funding and general fiscal

responsibility. With children in the Orinda schools, Bauer-Kahan knows how the local control funding formula, set up to bring up the districts that need more support, impacts the other districts. “We need to prioritize education,” she says, noting that California spends more on prisons than on schools. And she has a lot of ideas about how California can reduce its prison spending. “We need to do something about recidivism,” she says, pointing to a program initiated in Los Angeles that not only reduced recidivism by 40 percent, it was 50 percent cheaper to run.

While acknowledging that

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she is entering an Assembly with a Democratic super-majority, she believes that “we need to be careful with the health of the state budget.” She says that she believes in “slow government,” and notes that while there are many Democrats in the Assembly, “there are different shades of blue.” In addition, she points out that because of the change in term limits, she is joining the first class of Assembly members going into their eighth year.

“They are the most mature” members in a while, she says, and she is interested to see how that affects the Assembly.