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In Lafayette, another iconic restaurant goes up in flames

By Nick Marnell



Photos Gint Federas

Duncan Seibert sat with his wife at their table on the Postino Restaurant patio April 16. The Lafayette resident said they had just ordered dinner when he saw smoke rise from the building. "That's quite a bit of smoke coming out of the kitchen," Seibert said to his wife, and as the column of smoke rose high over the building, it quickly became obvious that there was a major problem.

"The hostess ushered people out to the patio, many of them carrying food and their drinks. When the fire department came, we had to leave. People just stood on the sidewalk and watched. Someone handed my wife a glass of chardonnay, which was good because we never even got our drinks," Seibert said.

Engine 15 of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District arrived first to the scene, and crews from ConFire and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District extinguished the fire in the kitchen but had to deal with a hidden fire in the attic area. "Roof over roof, ducting and storage over the many years of this historic establishment made it a very labor intensive incident. Crews worked extremely hard not only to cut and move structural items to reach the seat of a moving fire but also at preserving the rest of the structure," read the ConFire incident report. District spokesman Steve Hill said the crews took every effort to avoid causing unnecessary damage, recognizing the historical value of the building.

The fire rekindled memories of a 2017 fire to another iconic Lafayette restaurant. "Oh my God, I got chills when I heard," said Jeff Asadi, owner of La Finestra Restaurant which burnt to the ground and relocated to Moraga in 2018. "One day your restaurant is there, and then it's not. I know how hard it is. (The Postino owners) are my friends, and I am so sorry that they have to go through what I went through."

Postino co-owner Parry Tong presented an upbeat tone even knowing he faces difficulties with cleanup, insurance claims, permit approvals and construction. "We're working on everything, but it's all up in the air," said Tong, who hopes to reopen sometime in 2019.

The fire remains under investigation, but Lafayette Police Chief Ben Alldritt said that criminal activity had been ruled out as a cause. There were no reported injuries, and damage to the kitchen alone was estimated at \$100,000.

"The staff handled things very well, and we were never in danger," Seibert said.



Photos Gint Federas

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