

Published November 11th, 2020

County move to level Orange not a respite for Orinda businesses

By Sora O'Doherty



"Under the Marquee" events are one way Orinda Theatre owner Derek Zemrak keeps revenue and interest flowing. Photo Derek Zemrak

Even though Contra Costa County loosened COVID-19 controls on businesses, owners in the city of Orinda weren't celebrating. And the move to the California orange tier was quickly toned down with additional restrictions as Contra Costa County's COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have shown a marked increase each day since moving to the orange tier.

Some of the hardest hit businesses are gyms and dry cleaners. Tristan Tool, owner of In Forma gym in Orinda Village, said the fitness industry has been hit very hard. The gym was closed down for almost seven months. The gym reopened about three weeks ago, when it was allowed to have 10% occupancy. Now allowed up to 25% occupancy, Tool says it doesn't matter. "People are afraid to come back in," he said, "and they won't return until there is a vaccine." But Tool has invested a lot in the business since he bought it in June of 2019, so he's all in, hoping for a return to normal.

Jami Edgell, the General Manager of Anytime Fitness in Theatre Square said that the change to orange has helped a little bit, but volume remains pretty low. The

gym reopened as soon as they were allowed, on Sept. 30. She is maintaining a positive outlook and believes that it will be a great opportunity once people are aware that the gym is open.

Derek Zemrak, owner of the Orinda Theatre is not planning to reopen the theatre for general business anytime soon. "It's not worth it," he said. "We want to be safe and there's no need to rush." Zemrak is grateful for the successful GoFundMe campaign for the theatre which provided funds to sustain the business until March. Zemrak is doing private family rentals of the theatre, limited to 25 people, with a number of health precautions in place, such as temperature checks and special seat covers. While the weather is good, he's been holding Under the Marquee events on Fridays and Saturdays from 5 to 10 p.m., with drinks and/or food from Cine Cuvee. In addition, he's renting the marquee for private messages at a rate of \$75 for two days, which can be longer if there isn't another purchaser in the wings. Zemrak's other business, Republic of Cake, continues to do very well during the pandemic, increasing its wholesale sales to Diablo Foods.

Chris Berryhill, who with her husband owns Morrison's Jewelry in the Theatre District says that the pandemic has been really difficult on all businesses. The shop was completely closed for two months, but since reopening business has been steadily getting better, she said. She is concerned about the trend of internet shopping. "If people keep buying online," she said, "there won't be any local stores left."

Orinda has a number of cleaners, which used to be kept busy by people who were going to work every day and then attending social events, but that has all changed due to the pandemic. Fashion Cleaners in the Village is really struggling, and Jose Acer of Orinda Cleaners in the Theatre District says they are only able to remain open by taking second jobs outside the shop.

Photographer Scott McCue says his business is largely unaffected by the pandemic, because he got out of the wedding photography business years ago. He does mostly portraits and artwork for books now. Orinda Village Antiques owner Susan Leech says that her business is down owing to the fear factor among older people. She is open by appointment, and has even done one of her tea parties outdoors. Although the shop does not have an online presence, she is willing to do more tea parties in the style of sidewalk cafes.

Hilton House, the consignment shop in the Village, was only closed for two weeks. Considered an essential business because they hold people's valuables and make payments, the shop has actually enjoyed an influx of items, as people spending more time at home are both clearing things out and also making purchases to refresh their home environment. In addition, the shop has a robust website with over 10,000 followers on Instagram, according to owner Cindy Hilton.

Most Orinda restaurants are hanging on, many relying on take-out and delivery only. Taverna Pelligrino, which was Orinda's restaurant of the year in 2019, is closed during the pandemic. Casa Orinda, the county's oldest restaurant, boasts on its web page that it is open, sort of. The restaurant has added a large outdoor tented dining area, and also does take-out.

Businesses that rely on appointments, such as Rick Hudson Estate Liquidations, are far less affected by the pandemic.

Under the new restrictions, select high-risk activities must be modified. Outdoor bars are prohibited, except where allowed under restaurant guidance with drinks as part of a meal.

Indoor dining allowed at a maximum of 25% occupancy or 100 people, whichever is fewer (down from 50% occupancy and 200 people). Indoor movie theaters can operate at a maximum 25% of occupancy or 100 people, whichever is fewer (down from 50% occupancy or 200 people). Religious services indoors allowed at a maximum 25% occupancy or 100 people, whichever is fewer (down from 50% occupancy or 200 people). However, Orinda businesses seem unable to even come close to the lower numbers, let alone the higher.

More information on the county's website, <https://cchealth.org>

ReCHIC boutique raises money for Orinda Theatre

ReCHIC, a boutique consignment shop in the Village on Orinda Way, is selling Orinda Theatre-themed gift merchandise. Half of the proceeds from these items will go to the Orinda Theatre. Open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, ReCHIC will also schedule private shopping appointments on Tuesdays, Thursdays, evenings and weekends, and offers local delivery, national shipping, and curbside pickup. For more information, visit <https://shoprechic.com>



Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA