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## Outdoor event planning business pairs perfectly with pandemic restrictions

By Lou Fancher



Lucy Holmes-Higgin Photos provided

Childhood pursuits carried into adult purpose are leading young people, especially women, to pursue entrepreneurship, according to industry experts and census-takers tracking trends in the American workforce in 2021. Reflecting that dynamic locally, Gen-Zers Lucy Holmes-Higgin of Moraga and Andrea Tom of Alamo, both age 26, founded in May of this year Golden Poppy Collective. The Moraga-based small business provides event planning and produces "elevated picnics" and custom birthday parties that three months later extend as the company expands. Celebrations now include weddings, baby showers, bridal showers, expanded birthday parties with catering, anniversaries, elopements, marriage proposals and more.

"There's individual personality that comes with women-owned businesses; we have our own styles. At Golden Poppy Collective, I want us to become known for going above and beyond," says Holmes-Higgin in an interview.

Almost every company founder will claim the "above and beyond" position and when pressed, Holmes-Higgin concedes the point and digs deeper to describe the company's strengths. "Women and my generation, we have grit. We also know our boundaries. We differentiate the fine line between work and play. I struggled with that line at the beginning, because I've always loved planning events for my friends and family. Making it a

viable source of income took some work. That's the marker for my generation. We will take what we're passionate about and monetize it."

As a young girl growing up in Alamo and even when playing on her own, a favorite game was "playing office," she recalls. After attending college and working in corporate event planning Holmes-Higgin remembers most highly valuing the interactions with vendors and clients and setting up the logistics of mid-to large-scale events. "Being in charge of all of the details really got me going. I liked knowing the exact timelines, coordinating where and when people must be in certain places. I thrive on details."

At Golden Poppy, Tom is most active on the creative planning side: the designs and color choices involved in floral displays, tableware, glassware, decorative pillows, blankets, tents, lighting and signage provided. Holmes-Higgin works with clients on timelines, scouts the locations, explains to customers what to expect should weather or circumstances change - last minute pivots are expected during the pandemic, but are true regardless due to Golden Poppy's almost exclusively outdoor venues.

Packages range from \$200-\$650, depending on size and "add ons" such as additional guests, extra hours or mini photo sessions. Clients are given free rein to customize the basic Picnic, Birthday Time, Marry Me and other offerings.

"Our most popular event is our birthday package," says Holmes-Higgin. "We have games, balloons, and work with caterers. We can work with the client's caterer or we work with Susie Cakes in Lafayette. We have a go-to caterer, Priscilla Esquibel (Passion for Catering), based out of Hayward." Balloon arrangements she says draw the most memorable, instantaneous reactions - a soon-to-be-grandmother's tears of joy at a baby shower thrown for her daughter in Sonoma; a virtual baby shower during the pandemic where every guest shared the same Golden Poppy-created Zoom background. "When the woman who was pregnant saw it was the shower she wanted but couldn't have because of COVID and said it made her feel like they were together, it made me feel my work is worthwhile."

Responding to client requests, events have been held most frequently in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park or at Crissy Fields in the Presidio, the San Jose Rose Garden and at Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek.

"I would love to do a picnic in Moraga Park. It would be perfect for a kid's birthday party too. The playgrounds at The Commons are the perfect setup for Golden Poppy because it's local and Lamorinda parents can arrive easily," says Holmes-Higgin.

Golden Poppy has a community spotlight program that offers either in-kind donations or 10% of a month's sales to nonprofits and schools. "We've reached out to moms' groups to see who might want a donation to raffle off at fundraisers. I'd like to do schools but need to learn how that works. We don't have someone for September and October but are actively looking."

In the meantime, Holmes-Higgin and Tom plan to grow the business at a measured pace and work with the Lamorinda community to become more active locally, especially with events for children, mothers-to-be and families. For more information, visit [gopocollective.com](http://gopocollective.com)



Andrea Tom prepares flowers before an event.

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