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Business Person of the Year selection hits a high note with Lamorinda Music co-owner John McCormick

By Diane Claytor



John McCormick at Lamorinda Music in downtown Lafayette. Photo Colleen McCormick

Last year was a good year for Lafayette's John McCormick. The co-owner of Lamorinda Music completed his second term as president of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. His popular store was selected by Diablo Magazine readers as the East Bay's 2021 Best Musical Instrument Store. And he ended the year by being named the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year, an honor McCormick says was both surprising and extremely gratifying.

Music has always played an important role in McCormick's life. He met his wife (and business co-owner), Colleen, while both played alto saxophone in the Cal Marching Band. He still plays with both the Cal Alumni Band and the California Repercussions.

In 2009, music took on even more significance to McCormick. Colleen McCormick, who had been a science instructor, decided to change careers. After

contemplating various options, the couple elected to open a music store. "We thought about what we know and like and music was the clear answer," John McCormick said.

Acknowledging they had no experience with small business ownership, the McCormicks did their due diligence, visiting various music stores for ideas and to learn what worked and what didn't. They created a business plan and found the perfect Lafayette location, "less than two miles from home," John McCormick happily notes. The building had originally been a beauty salon and John McCormick remembers that "all the walls were plastered with pink wallpaper. We spent weeks scraping it off."

The goal was to have a warm, friendly, welcoming spot where music is fun and everyone is treated like family and friends, John McCormick states.

Colleen McCormick ran the day-to-day operations of Lamorinda Music in the beginning while John McCormick stuck with that old adage, "Don't quit your day job." He didn't. He continued working in the tech field but spent nights and weekends working at their store. That all changed approximately five years ago when John McCormick did quit his day job and began working full time in the store.

Lamorinda Music provides instrument sales, rentals and repairs and offers lessons in everything from voice, piano, guitar and various band instruments. They have expanded twice and currently have 13 studios and 30 instructors working with hundreds of students, "from pro musicians, enthusiastic amateurs and wide-eyed elementary students renting their first instruments," McCormick says. The store hosts recitals, group classes, jams and concerts. There are two full-time repair technicians working on a variety of instruments for both individuals and local school districts.

One recent customer, reviewing Lamorinda Music on social media, said, "This place is fantastic, the people who work here all have great knowledge . and the fact that you can rent-to-own is absolutely amazing."

Once he began working at the store full time, McCormick joined the board of the Lafayette Chamber and immediately became an active and involved member. In 2020 he was elected president. "I had a vision of all the Chamber could do under my presidency," McCormick says. "I had lots of ideas. And then COVID happened." That, of course, presented very different challenges. According to the Chamber's executive director, Jay Lifson, once COVID hit, goals and projects changed out of necessity and "under John's leadership, we were able to pivot to a new purpose: saving our local economy."

The Chamber worked hard and, McCormick states proudly, "did phenomenal work during the pandemic. The Chamber was, in many ways, the lifeline for local businesses," he says.

While a new Chamber president is typically elected every year, McCormick asked to serve a second term. "John asked for another year," Lifson reports. "He felt he hadn't been able to do all the great things he had planned and he wanted to continue helping our local businesses."

Lifson states that under McCormick's leadership, some really meaningful work was done "and we have more members now than we did before COVID, actually adding 100 new members last year alone."

It wasn't a difficult decision, then, when the time came to select the Chamber's 2022 Business Person of the Year. McCormick more than meets the organization's criteria: Working to support and promote a healthy business climate and enhance lives in Lafayette; modeling excellence in everything he does; giving time and energy to help make Lafayette a community where people want to live, work and shop; and making us proud to be a member of this community. "John is the perfect mix of nice guy, extremely bright and interested in everything that's happening around him," Lifson says.

As if Lamorinda Music and the Chamber haven't kept McCormick busy enough, he was a Lafayette Partners in Education (LPIE) volunteer for 20 years and is currently an active volunteer with the Park Theater Trust. And he has returned to school: McCormick will proudly receive his master's in history from Harvard later this year.

The Chamber's dinner to honor McCormick, originally planned for next month has, unfortunately, been postponed due to COVID; it will be rescheduled as soon as it's safe to do so.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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