

Coffee, crisis & community collaboration at Papillon in Lafayette



Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

Jim Straw, Lauren Michelle Stevens, Papillon owner Betty Chuluun and Emilee Shoebottom worked together to help a patron on March 23 at Papillon in Lafayette.

By Sharon K. Sobotta

Laughter, voices and stories lingered inside the bustling Papillon café in Lafayette on March 23 as clusters of friends, colleagues and community members had their morning coffee.

Lauren Michelle Stevens, a minister at the Lafayette United Methodist Church, chatted away with Jim Straw and a few other people from church when something abruptly changed. Julia, who has requested that we not use her full name, stopped responding. “She’s usually pretty talkative, so I knew something wasn’t right,” Stevens says. “We sent someone to get water for her and then she stopped moving.” Stevens called 911 and stayed on the phone for eight long minutes, while a number of Papillon patrons stepped in along with a few others from neighboring Tutu’s.

Stevens is just getting back to the pre-COVID weekly ritual of a drop-in morning coffee with congregants. She and the others were chatting when Julia mentioned being dizzy. “She put her head

down and we kept an eye on her and her husband went to get her a glass of water,” Stevens says. “We thought maybe she’d had too much coffee or that maybe she should consult with her doctor, but nothing seemed urgent until she stopped moving, stopped responding and seemed to stop breathing (for a few seconds).” Stevens answered questions for the 911 dispatcher, at various times searching for a pulse and saying Julia’s name.

Meanwhile, Lafayette City Manager Niroop Srivatsa, who was enjoying a beverage outside when this happened, rushed to neighboring Tutu’s in search of a doctor. Srivatsa didn’t find one, but her efforts weren’t lost. When Tutu’s patron Emilee Shoebottom, who previously worked at a hospital in England and has been trained in CPR, caught wind of what happened, she left her friends behind and rushed over to lend a hand. By then, about six minutes had passed and Julia became responsive again. Shoebottom crouched down in front of Julia and stayed there and talked to her

until EMS arrived.

Shoebottom says she was happy to delay her breakfast to help a community member. “I think if you’ve had any training or worked in a hospital and something goes wrong, you should do something,” Shoebottom says.

Straw paced back and forth between the table where the medical emergency was happening and the doorway of Papillon as he kept an eye out for the EMS team. “This is just a come as you are drop-in coffee hour,” Straw says. “I came today because I was really looking forward to a relaxing morning. Since the pandemic a lot of us are excited to get out and congregate again and find a sense of community.”

As Straw kept a watchful eye in each direction while waiting for the ambulance to arrive, Betty Chuluun, owner of Papillon, cleared the path between the door and the tables and also watched with concern. “I was so scared. Her face was turning gray. My heart felt like it stopped,” Chuluun recalls. “When she started breathing again, I got more relaxed. I’m glad that

she got help and I hope she gets better soon.”

On top of being relieved to see her customer get the medical support she needed, Chuluun was in awe of Papillon patrons. “I’m so glad that we have such great customers that care so much about each other.”

As Julia’s husband gathered his things and prepared to meet his wife at the hospital, he was also hopeful about her recovery and counting his blessings for the Good Samaritans who stepped in to help. “It’s much better that we were here when this happened than at home by ourselves,” Julia’s husband says. “We had lots of good people supporting us.”

Stevens reported that Julia received medical treatment and is doing much better. The incident did, however, teach Stevens some things about emergency preparedness that she’ll be following up on with business owners on Lafayette Circle. “The 911 dispatcher asked me to have a defibrillator close by just in case we needed it because although she was breathing and had a pulse, she was unresponsive. It

seemed unclear if any of the businesses in that center have one,” Stevens says. “Jim (Straw) would’ve grabbed one from the church if necessary. But, it’s on my list now to follow up (with businesses about that).”

Regarding the coffee hour that turned out to be way less relaxing than Stevens or the others imagined it to be, Stevens says she’s glad they were together. “I do think that if there’s an upside to this, it’s that she was around so many people who cared about her (even if they didn’t know her) who were willing to help.”

After the Papillon patron was taken to the hospital by ambulance, several others deliberated over whether to call 911 or the local fire department during an emergency in Lafayette. Srivatsa confirmed that when in Lafayette, the number to call for an emergency is always 911, regardless if the caller is using a cell phone or a landline. As for the way in which people came together to help the distressed Papillon patron, Srivatsa says she’s not surprised at all: “I’m impressed,” she says. “That’s Lafayette.”

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Scouts at work



Photo provided

Submitted by Rob Jacobus

Local Boy and Girl Scouts joined together on March 18, finishing up work on March 19 to make repairs to the old school bus stop in Orinda at the corner of Spring and Brookwood roads.

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