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## Regan takes the reins at Lafayette Chamber

By Diane Claytor



Lafayette Chamber Executive Director Sara Regan (left) with Chamber member, Rolla Ghaben, co-owner of Batch and Brine. Photo Holly Sonne

community. Nine years ago, faced with the daunting prospect of putting four kids through college, Regan decided it was time to look for a paying job. It's pure luck that at the same time, the Lafayette Chamber was looking for an events coordinator. An interview with Lifson landed her the job.

She has worked with members throughout her time at the Chamber and, in her new position, she says the most important thing now is getting out and seeing the members, "letting them know we're here, always talking about what we can do the help them."

Kathy Merchant, a member of the Chamber's Executive Committee, has every confidence in Regan. Following Lifson's retirement announcement, Merchant said, "We tapped an equally amazing leader who shares the same values of community engagement and hard work."

Past President John McCormick echoes those sentiments. "While it was very sad to have Jay leave, the board knew that Sara would be an excellent executive director. We are excited to see her keep the Chamber moving forward as a tremendous asset for local businesses and our community."

Regan knows that following Lifson won't be easy. "I'm following an icon. He really built the Chamber," she says. The biggest thing now, coming out of COVID, Regan notes, is finding a good balance and determining the new normal.

COVID adversely impacted the Chamber, like it did with everything else. The organization decreased its staff, discontinued its events, lost some members. But the smaller staff took on more responsibilities, working with the members to find ways to help them and showing them how working together could help them prosper and succeed, Regan reports. In fact, according to McCormick, during COVID, Regan "worked miracles with our membership."

The Chamber was instrumental in helping the restaurants work around the ban on indoor dining during the pandemic. "Jay was out there pounding the pavement to see what we could do to keep the restaurants viable," Regan says. They are continuing to help this important segment of Lafayette's business community by spearheading an ad hoc restaurant committee to work on a variety of challenges, including staffing shortages and inflation.

Today, "membership is the best since 2017," Regan proudly states. She sees that people want to connect with the community. New businesses are coming in and she's confident it will keep growing. The Chamber has hired a new member engagement coordinator because, Regan says, "as we've grown the membership,

Sara Regan knew she had big shoes to fill when she took over as executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. After all, she was replacing the much beloved, much respected Jay Lifson, who had been at the helm of the organization for 17 years. But after spending time with Regan, who is down-to-earth, warm, friendly, exuberant and passionate about Lafayette and its growing business community, one has little doubt that she will be every bit as successful - and appreciated - as her predecessor.

Regan has lived in Lamorinda for 22 years. Having grown up in larger metropolitan areas, she remembers thinking Lamorinda "was in the middle of nowhere" when her parents moved here in 1987. It wasn't long before she realized there's no place she'd rather be. "This is such a great community," she says, "both for living and working. I always wanted a place my kids could ride their bikes, walk to school. Lamorinda is a perfect example of a real community."

The Chamber was formed in 1947 with a stated mission of "promoting and maintaining a healthy business climate and preserving and enhancing the quality of life in Lafayette." The mission remains the same today.

At first glance, Regan may appear to be an unlikely choice to head up this 680-member nonprofit organization. She was a Lafayette stay-at-home mom for more than 16 years, actively volunteering in the

we really want to support them. We want to find out what they need and how we can help them."

In addition to figuring out what the new normal may be, Regan sees 2023 as a time to "streamline efforts to be more relevant in the community." She wants to keep the relationships they have built over the years and support the "membership we have been able to build back up." She looks forward to "getting off the roller coaster and having some stability in the business community."

Chamber Executive Committee member Merchant is confident that Regan will be able to accomplish these goals. "Sara's irrepressible humor, grace with members and the greater community, and her commitment to inclusive leadership continues the Chamber's legacy as an unwavering partner with the city," she says.

Regan is especially proud of the team she works with - both her staff and her board. "They're the ones that really make it all happen."

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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