

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

YES! Town Hall Theatre has something for everyone – even adults



Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

Adult improv class participants share laughs at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette.

By Sharon K. Sobotta

When Tim Shoji, a Moraga resident and a financial advisor, went online to register his daughter for a children's improv class at Lafayette's Town Hall Theatre, he found more than he bargained for.

"I randomly found an adult improv class (called 'Yes-And-Wine') and decided to sign up and I'm having a lot of fun," Shoji says. "I realized I had stopped trying new things. I'm a financial advisor, so I talk to people about money (for my day job). Doing this lets me exercise a different part of my brain."

Shoji is one of the half dozen people who have been showing up since March for the adult improv class which takes place every third Sunday from 7 to 9 p.m. It comes with two drinks (alcoholic or non), on-the-spot exercises, community connections and countless laughs. It costs about the same or perhaps slightly less than having a few drinks out on the town (\$30) and also has scholarship or partial scholarship opportunities available. As long as the class is offered, Shoji says he'll be there. "I think it's important to have something like this not just

here in Lamorinda but everywhere (for all age groups and disciplines)," Shoji says. "There's so much pressure to learn skills like math and science, but I also recognize that art nurtures the soul so we really need a robust program within the community to help people nurture that side (of themselves)."

Lisa Anne Morrison is at the center of the 'Yes-And-Wine' adult improv class and she seems to have just as much fun as her intergenerational crowd of students ranging in age from early 20s to 80s. The class's title stems directly from the foundation of improv – 'Yes, And,' and the wine, for those who choose, can be the social lubricant to lean in. "I feel like I'm pretty good at putting people at ease. Sometimes they come in nervous and by the end of class, they're surprising themselves," Morrison says. "They're taking that step (toward being creative while playing with improv) and really enjoying themselves."

As an actor with experience under her belt and the mother of someone who was involved with Town Hall Theatre, Morrison knew for certain that she didn't want adults to be left out. "Teaching

adults is something that I feel passionately about. There's all this programming for kids. But adults (would) drop off their kids, and (wonder) why don't I get to do theater and play like I used to?" Morrison set out to fill that void. "I wanted to give parents (and adult community members) who work so hard a place to come and meet new people and laugh."

Neja Diani drove over from San Ramon to join the class after being gifted a package of classes. "It's super intimidating (at first) but I'm loving it. We've had so much laughter in the past few hours," Diani said after class. "Improv specifically gets people out of their comfort zones. It makes everybody more creative."

As House Manager, Trisha Kelley greets the adult improv students each month and pours them their drinks. Kelley has been the theatre's house manager for eight years, but her time with Town Hall Theatre dates back to the 1960s when she did ballet and continued as her own children were involved with programs at the theatre. "As we get older, we forget to use our creativity and imagination and that's why I love seeing some of the people who are older than

children back in here using their brains to get light-hearted," Kelley says. "There's nothing better than sitting below the theatre (where drinks and snacks are served) and hearing people interact and laugh."

Behind the bar that Kelley staffs is a sign which reads, "Have your drinks everywhere." Kelley says that sentiment is part of what makes the Town Hall Theatre the place it is. "We want people to feel like they can come here for a fun and quaint night out. We've kind of got a Cheers vibe going on here and it's meant to be fun and relaxing and it is."

Dennis Markham, the managing director, says community engagement and community involvement is not just a part of the vision of Town Hall Theatre but a part of the building itself which was built in 1944 during World War II. "This was built as a gathering place and the company itself was founded by mothers who were looking for activities to do with their children," Markham says. "The first year was all women and our first production was a Christmas show and it's grown from there."

The pandemic hit the theatre hard, causing attendance to drop and a lag in participation. Still, Markham is optimistic that with programs ranging from summer camp for kids to back porch music concerts to new voices plays along with traditional acts and adult programs like 'Yes And Wine,' the seats will fill up again. Markham hopes that if someone has always wanted to try out for a play, they do it, and that if they have a creative idea for another program, they do that too.

"There is something for everyone here. Anybody is welcome to audition for parts in plays or participate in any of our educational or engagement activities. We have opportunities for seasoned professionals as well as for people who are new to acting, and lots to offer appreciators of theatre who want to come out for a good time."

The monthly 'Yes-And-Wine' class takes place the third Sunday of every month. For information about that, audition opportunities for all ages, upcoming shows or camps for children, visit townhalltheatre.com.

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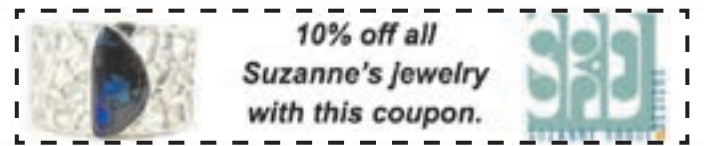
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Campolindo Robotics Club offers new Girl Scouts STEM program



Photo provided

Submitted by
Meera Phadnis

Thanks to patience, persistence, and dedicated community support, the Campolindo Robotics Club (active since 2006) helped develop, and is offering, a new Girl Scouts STEM program. The Robotics Club is known for competing with other Bay Area robotics teams in the FIRST Tech Challenge. The Club has won several awards this year.

The primary goal of these workshops is to inspire more women to enter STEM careers by exposing them to exciting, hands-on group projects and activities. The first session consists of girls working in small groups to construct mBlock robots; the second focuses on coding the robots using the Blockly app. The final project allows for more freedom and creativity, enabling the Scouts to develop and

present their own fun twist.

Campo Robotics relies on the Parents Club for financial support, with help from local companies, such as Moraga Ace Hardware. For this new venture, the Kiwanis Club of Moraga Valley provided critical funding to purchase a starter set of robots and computers. Many individuals also stepped up. Mrs. Stephanie Verbanszky, a local troop leader and chemistry teacher at Campolindo High School, provided the opportunity to work with her troop in developing the curriculum. Ms. Nita Madra, a Campolindo STEM teacher, is the Club's leading mentor and helped guide the team. Mr. Ferenc Kovac (Kiwanis) spearheaded the effort and helped provided supplies, contacts, and insight to community outreach programs, as well as volunteer help from UC Berkeley's College of Engi-

neering women faculty, staff, alumni, and Shefali Goel, a current student. Campolindo's Tech Club also contributed with post-production of Craig Kovac's online tutorial video on the robot components, assembly, and functions.

The Campolindo Robotics Club is looking to schedule more workshops with Girl Scouts troops. The plan is to roll it out to more of the local GSUSA Service Unit 327, which consists of over 800 girls. For more information or to schedule workshops with the Campolindo Robotics Club, you can visit their official website at campolindobossbots.com or email them at campolindobossbots@gmail.com.



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