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Lafayette's New Business Person of The Year

By Sophie Braccini



Ed Stokes poses in his store by a picture of himself taken 20 years ago, when he first received the Business Person of the Year Award Photo Sophie Braccini

difficult economy, Diablo Foods reports over 4% growth for 2009. The storeowner believes that this is the result of the excellent work of each of his department managers who run their own operations, the quality and diversity of his products, the reasonable pricing, and the excellent customer service. Innovative elements such as the new local fruit and vegetable stand contribute to the growth of the business as well.

With a first great-grandchild on the way, Stokes' perspective is definitely set on the future. "We will keep the business for years to come," he promises. A dinner to celebrate Stokes will be held at the Lafayette Park Hotel on January 22. Lafayette's new Mayor, Brandt Andersson, will present the State of the City Address during the evening.

Twenty years ago the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce elected its first businessperson of the year. Ed Stokes, founder of Diablo Foods, was the first nominee. This year, the Chamber decided to honor once more the veteran businessman who remains active at the helm of one of the last independent grocery stores in the area. Ed Stokes is once again, and to his amazement, Lafayette Business Person of the Year.

"I was shocked when I heard it," says Stokes, "I am part of the Advisory Board of the Chamber that nominates the candidates and I had no idea that my colleagues had been conspiring to elect me." In his office above the store where he comes to work every day, the plaques displayed on the walls are the testimonies of his generosity. They read "Founding Sponsor of The Lafayette Jazz Festival," "Acalanes Friend of Education," "Generous Rotarian," "Lafayette Honorary Mayor." These signs explain the popularity and the success of Stokes and his family. "We have to give back to the community where we live," says Stokes, who has been a Lafayette resident for 40 years, "our profits are spent and re-invested here." Stokes was also Citizen of the Year. He is a past President of the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club and Town Hall Theater.

Stokes, who is now helped by two of his children and one grandchild, does not plan to retire soon. "I am only 87," he says, "I enjoy coming to work every morning and keeping an eye on everything." Stokes' recipe for success is working because, despite a

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