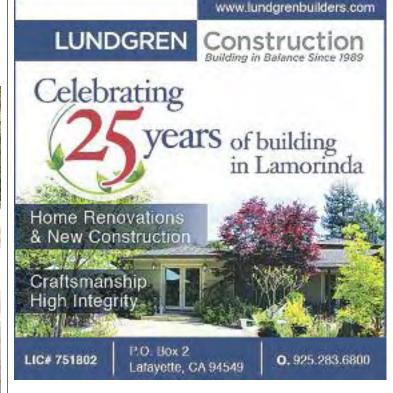
LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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Lamorinda's French Community A kaleidoscope of origins linked by the love of their language **By Sophie Braccini**





Francophiles gather at the pétanque field in Lafayette to celebrate Bastille Day.

he French are not known for being gregarious, and in fact, they pride themselves on their individualism. In a Lamorinda crowd they remain inconspicuous and often but after a while, they can become Julien Clerc, Stromae, or Johnny Halhomesick and seek their compatriots. lyday (yes, he is a French singer!). While one of the smallest sub-groups Bay Area – local residents have found French tutor Virginie Pelpel. ways to reach out to each other.

to attract the French: the Langeac Society, recently revived thanks to volunteers like Catherine Jolivet, Stephenie Teichman, or Lafayette Chamber of Commerce executive director Jay Lifson; and the Lamorinda Pétanque Society where they play the beloved French boules game. Tens of French, French/American, Québécois, Americans of French origin, French speakers from Europe or the Middle-East often gather and socialize informally, and every time they do, they discover new people who join this expanding Lamorinda French community.

One of Lafayette's iconic French figures, Jolivet first came to the U.S. more politically correct Anglo-Saxon as an exchange student for a year in crowd. her teens. Once she was finished with French high school, she packed her bags and came back. She became a Lafayette. A group met there July 13 credentialed teacher and started her to celebrate Bastille Day (July 14 was own school, French For Fun, 38 years a working day here), playing the ago. She moved the successful for- French ball game, sharing a potluck eign language immersion program to picnic with nice cheeses and quiches, Lafayette 20 years ago, and has stu- and singing songs with professional dents as young as 6 months old. Now local French singer Isabelle Magidson an American citizen, she recently revived the Langeac society, a nonprofit incorporated in 1981 around the sister was formed thanks to the energy of city agreement between Lafayette and the French town of Langeac, where the Marquis de Lafayette was born. She and Lifson are planning a Francophile party for the Marquis' birthday on Sept. 6 in the downtown Lafayette Plaza. Jolivet found some of her volunteers for the society's revival at Café ball players don't all speak Italian. Lamorinda meetings, informal gatherings of 50-plus French-speaking in- September 6 will be for everybody Belgium, Lebanon, and the U.S. The

group has a Facebook page called Cafe Lamorinda, and they sometimes attend local events in San Francisco or Berkeley, such as a play in French, or concerts featuring one of their seek their new American community, French idols like Charles Aznavour, The group also has a serious hiking east of the tunnel - the French Con- club, led by energetic Québécoise sulate in San Francisco estimates Diane Rivest, and a more relaxed there are 50,000 French citizens in the walking group organized by local

Some of the people you will meet In Lafayette, two institutions tend at gatherings include the Barendsons, a French couple with three kids who moved to Orinda a year ago, the Gourlins, a Moraga French couple and their three children, the Du Saults from Québec, Zeina Hissen from Lebanon and owner of Powell's Sweet Shoppe, Lafayette real estate agent Julie Barlier, who married a Frenchman and lived in Paris for years, or Moraga's Irline VanArdenne, born in the U.S. to a French mother. The newcomers share their surprises about coming to the country and seek advice on where to find the best food; those who have been here long just want to speak French and be themselves, more carefree than in a

> One of the community's favorite outings is at the pétanque field in

Lafayette will be honored and celebrated. We expect many people to come and have fun, en français or in English!"

Photo Sophie Braccini

Lamorinda Weekly plans to publish additional stories about other cultures in Lamorinda. If you are a transplant from another country living in Lamorinda, contact the reporter at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com.



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(Duo Gadjo).

The Lamorinda pétanque society some local French residents, such as Orinda's Pascal Gravier and Lafayette's Gilbert Sonet, and their American friends Mary Albright and Greg Arthur. A large contingent of players, some of them competitors at the national level, are not French speakers, much like how the bocce

"The Marquis' birthday party on dividuals from France, Québec, who likes France," concludes Jolivet. "There will be French food, music, members are loosely organized and entertainment for kids. It will be a meet for coffee or lunch at La multigenerational event where busi-Boulange (founded by a San Fran- nesses that have ties with France will cisco French family, the Rigos). The be present, where the history of



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