

# American Kitchen Opens in Lafayette

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Chef Allan Rivera and Victor Ivry in front of their new Lafayette restaurant, American Kitchen. Photo Sohie Braccini

American Kitchen is Victor Ivry's new baby. The Orinda resident, sports coach and commercial real estate professional, who entered the restaurant business four years ago with the opening of Table 24, and later Barbacoa, in Theatre Square with partner Michael Karp, recently opened American Kitchen in Lafayette. Ivry has a new partner in this venture, eclectic chef Allan Rivera, and is taking full advantage of the completely renovated 80-year-old cottage, and its shaded grounds, on Lafayette Circle. American Kitchen brings distinctive dishes and flavors gathered from across the United States, contrasting with the prevalent California vibe of

the burgeoning food mecca. The charming and relaxed atmosphere quickly drew curious patrons and Rivera started sending out the food he loves – a mix of traditional regional foods from the Deep South, the mid-Atlantic, Midwest and Northeast. As Rivera puts it, he pulls from the whole breadth of American comfort food. In college Rivera studied philosophy and pre-law, but after graduating he decided that law school wasn't for him and instead traveled the country to find himself. He always had a love of cooking, born in the family kitchen that mixed Italian and Puerto Rican origins with the flavors of New York. When presented with the opportunity

to start a restaurant in Hawaii, he jumped at the chance and hasn't stopped cooking since.

Watching him at work in his kitchen, it seems clear that he has found his calling. A gourmet who enjoys the good things in life, he likes to experiment and try new twists on old favorites. We found Rivera and his team creating a new brine and spice mix for the brisket that will become the house pastrami, and preparing house-smoked salmon.

American Kitchen began serving breakfast and lunch on Aug. 25, and added dinner hours a few days later. "We are starting with a dinner menu that pulls some elements from the lunch menu. With a new restaurant, you want to do things and you want to do them well, before you expand," explains Rivera. "As the teams get trained and patrons' preferences become clear, we will modify the menu to follow our clients' inclination."

Appetizers include deep fried sweet pickles and quick-roasted olives; among the entrées are pastrami on rye, a "true cod" slider with fennel slaw, burgers, salads, and homemade chorizo that adds a delicious, smoky flavor to a mussels and frites dish that's bound to become a favorite. "We make our own chorizo and we will brine our own sauerkraut," says Rivera. Since everything is made right there, Rivera can cater to different dietary needs from vegetarian to gluten or dairy free. "You just have to ask," he says.

Sitting on the patio after a lunch service, Ivry enjoys a moment's respite before debriefing with the team and talking finance with the local investors who have helped him manifest his dream. "This is the best patio in town," he says. Although he retains part-ownership of Barbacoa and Table 24, Ivry is thrilled to be creating something new and exciting. "We work very hard here, but this is casual and comfortable," says the

man who has a reputation for asking 110 percent from his crew.

"I love the excitement of the day-to-day, and everyday is an opportunity to win people over," says Ivry, who concludes with something his mother told him when he opened Table 24. "You won't be judged by who comes to your restaurant, you will be judged by who returns to your restaurant." Ivry is sure that with great

food, great service and a beautiful, intimate location, he has the winning formula that will make people want to come back over and over again.

**American Kitchen**  
71 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette  
(925) 385-0352

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## business briefs

### Theaters for Sale

Just as the 17th Annual California Independent Film Festival gears up for opening night comes word that the two different owners of the Rheem Theatre and Orinda Theatre Square are putting up "For Sale" signs. In Orinda, GLL Properties is selling Theatre Square after completely turning the center around during its eight years of management. And in Moraga, Mahesh Puri wants to sell the property that encompasses the theater and shops all the way to Ristorante Amoroma. Commercial real estate broker Dave Schnayer said that Puri is asking \$4.75 million for the property. Derek Zemrak, co-founder of the California Annual Independent Film Festival Association that leases and operates both theaters, said that he and his team are planning to continue to manage the businesses as usual.

### The Secret Phrase is "Orinda-mazing"

#### ECHO Grove

2 Theatre Square, #112, Orinda  
(925) 253-1266, www.echogrovestore.com

Orinda's newest gift shop has announced a fun fall promotion that reflects the store's appreciation for the warm welcome it has received from the city. Starting Sept. 1, shoppers who say the secret phrase will be rewarded with a free handmade charm. The charms are custom designed and handmade exclusively for Echo Grove by one of its favorite makers. They can be attached to backpacks, key chains, charm bracelets, or wine glasses. No purchase is necessary, and the charms will not be available for purchase, so the only way to get them is to utter the secret phrase. September's secret phrase is "Orinda-mazing." The first two charms highlight a "back to school" spirit. One features the Miramonte Matadors logo and the second charm bears a small detail of the historic Orinda Union School. Subsequent charms will feature Orinda landmarks, events, people and other images that honor Orinda, its history and community. "Our hope is that people get excited about collecting the charms and we continue issuing a new design throughout 2015," said Echo Grove co-owner Margaret Doty.



# Lafayette Family Opens Food Truck

By Zoe Portnoff



From left: Alex, Isabelle, Tina, and Tom Tankka Photos provided

What do you get when you cross a food truck with a frozen treat? Izzy's Frozen Ice Cream Custard and Treats, a new venture by a Lafayette family. You can try izzy's frozen dessert straight from the truck at the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival Sept. 20-21.

Tina Tankka's interest in opening a food truck stems from her passion for creating gourmet food and her catering experience. From home dinner parties, to contributing food and service to Lafayette Library and Learning Center community events, Cal Shakes, and local schools, Tankka prides herself on an experience in taste, quality ingredients and presentation. She is joined in her business by her husband, Tom, and her two

daughters, Alex and Isabelle, for whom the company, izzy's Frozen Ice Cream Custard and Treats, is named.

"I loved the idea of the mobility of a food truck, allowing me to offer

my custard ice cream to many people," says Tankka.

Izzy's Frozen Ice Cream Custard and Treats serves gourmet frozen ice cream custard, a delicious concoction distinguished from ice cream by a single additional ingredient – egg yolk – that creates a creamier, richer texture. And since the dessert is prepared at the place of sale, rather than stored, consumers are guaranteed a fresh treat.

Frozen ice cream custard was invented in 1919, when two ice cream makers on Coney Island discovered that adding egg yolk to their recipe created a unique texture, and also helped their ice cream stay at a cooler temperature.

Simply put, "It's ice cream at its finest," says Tankka.



### Free Flagship Seminar

#### Career Wisdom Institute

1036 Country Club Dr, #100, Moraga  
(925) 212-7805, www.careerwisdominstitute.com

The Career Wisdom Institute will be offering a seminar, "Inside Job, 8 Secrets to Loving Your Work and Thriving," from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sept. 26. There is a \$10 seat-holding fee. "This seminar is great for men and women in career transitions," says institute partner Sherry Berman. "Anyone struggling with work, either finding it, keeping it or wanting work to be more meaningful, will benefit from this event." The seminar is designed to teach the secrets of satisfying and lucrative work and that passion, heart, and spirit have cash value in today's market.

### Moraga Employee of the Month



From left: Kevin Reneau, Julia Hoang, Danielle Gossell and Debbie Roessler Photo provided

Danielle Gossell, a lead dental assistant and community relations assistant for Lamorinda Dental, has been named the Moraga Employee of the Month for August. Gossell has played a critical role in building the new dental practice operated by Dr. Julia Hoang, which began in 2012 and has over 600 current patients. She will be presented with her award, along with gift cards to Safeway and Mountain Mike's Pizza, at the Moraga Rotary luncheon on Sept. 23.

### News from the Chambers of Commerce

#### Lafayette

The Art & Wine Festival is just around the corner! The annual event will be open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 20, and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 21 in downtown Lafayette. The festival offers non-stop music and dancing, unique wine and beer offerings, food choices everywhere, original fine art and crafts. New this year, local artists will create original pieces of art to the rhythms of the Fiesta Stage (see article page A1). The fair is family and dog friendly and features a large Kids Zone. For more information, go to <http://lafayettefestival.com>.

#### Moraga

Shred Event next to 5A Rent A Space, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 13, 455 Moraga Rd. - \$5/Banker Box size.

#### Orinda

Don't miss the 10th Annual Orinda Classic Car Show, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 13. Go to [www.orindacarshow.com](http://www.orindacarshow.com) for information about this and other events taking place during the Classic Car Show Weekend.



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