

business briefs

Intraware To Be Sold

Intraware Inc., an Orinda software services company, has agreed to sell itself to Acreso Software, a private equity firm's subsidiary for \$27 million. The company that provides online services to deliver and manage software and digital files, was founded in the late 90s by Peter Jackson and Mark Hoffman. After a difficult period in 2001, the company fought its way back to profitability under the direction of Jackson. "Intraware has deep expertise in (software services), and an impressive list of partners and customers, including a number of shared customers," Mark Bishof, Acreso's president, said in prepared comments. The sale is expected to close in December or January. Jackson said he believes the new owner will retain the majority of Intraware's 60 employees. The future operation will likely have East Bay offices.

Mountain Mike's of Lafayette Honors Veterans, 3614 Mt. Diablo Blvd. (next to Citibank) - 283-6363

Mountain Mike's Pizza in Lafayette offers free lunch buffet to ALL active duty and retired members of the United States Armed Forces on Tuesday, November 11th from 11 to 2 p.m. in honor of Veterans Day. "We want to Honor all those who have served and all who are currently serving," said Ben Mahoney, "and we will be accepting donations for the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund as well."

Mt. Diablo Business Women Networking Dinner

On November 13th from 5:45 - 8:30 p.m. The group invites its members and interested parties to join their networking dinner at the Lafayette Park Hotel, 3287 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette. The November Speaker is Susan Urquhart-Brown, author of "The Accidental Entrepreneur: Practical Wisdom for People Who Never Expected to Work for Themselves." Register early, no walk-ins. \$37 member, \$44 guest. For info contact: www.mtdiablobusinesswomen.org.

A Message From Lafayette Police Chief Mike Hubbard:

On 10-22-08 a string of robberies occurred in Contra Costa County. There were three robberies in the early afternoon in the Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek areas. At 5:15 p.m. the 76 gas station on the corner of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and First Street was robbed. A black male, wearing a hoodie, entered the business with a handgun and demanded money. The suspect fled on foot and was not found. Between 9:00 and 10:00 pm two more robberies occurred in Orinda. The first at Village Pizza and the second at Concina Mexicana. In both instances a dark skinned male, wearing a hoodie entered the business with a handgun and demanded money. The Orinda Police Department and the Lafayette Police Department are working on these cases.

The most important thing to note is that no one was hurt. It is vital that the business owners and their employees know what to do in these situations. The most important rule of thumb is COOPERATE. There is No Thing worth risking your life for. There is a reason so many medals for bravery and heroics are issued posthumously.

Here are some other tips on Crime Prevention for your business:

1. Secure and / or anchor your safe to concrete.
2. Fully illuminate the exterior and parts of the interior of the building and grounds at night.
3. Consider motion detector lights and low voltage alternatives.
4. Locate check-out counters near the front of the store, clearly visible from the outside so that employees can better watch all activities. Place all entrances under visual surveillance.
5. Train your employees to be aware of suspicious persons and call the Police Dispatch immediately.
6. Prevent easy access to the roof or fire escape from the ground by trimming trees adjacent to the building. Secure windows, roof access, and fire escape ladders with locking covers.
7. If possible, install rear windows to face parking areas for increased visibility.
8. Do not cover up windows with display material.
9. Use interior shelving and displays no higher than five feet, even lower in the front of the window.
10. Design loading areas that avoid creating hiding places for people and merchandise.
11. Maintain clear visibility from the store to the street, sidewalk, parking areas and passing vehicles.
12. If you are considering purchasing an alarm system or digital video surveillance system, contact several reputable companies and get a full assessment of your needs.
13. If you do purchase an alarm system, consider adding the following: Panic Buttons, Fire/Smoke Detectors, Monitored System (contacts Law Enforcement in case of an Alarm)

Check with your local Police Department for more tips on how to prepare your business.

Chambers of Commerce News:

Lafayette Chamber of Commerce

- November Chamber Mixer at Queen Bee on Wed. Nov. 12th 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.; 261 Lafayette Circle.
- Entrepreneur's Club, Thursday November 20th at 8:30 a.m. will take you on a road trip to The Nut Factory, 3477 Golden Gate Way.

Moraga Chamber of Commerce

- Chamber monthly meeting Friday, November 21 at 8 a.m. (7:30 a.m. coffee) at Fireside Room Hacienda.

Orinda Chamber of Commerce

- Breakfast Meeting on Thursday, November 13, 2008 from 8:00 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. at Shelby's Restaurant, Theater Square. Continental Breakfast Cost \$10.00 Speaker to be announced.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com or call our office at 925-377-0977.

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Economic Crisis: How Are Our Banks Doing?

By Sophie Braccini



John Rossell CBC CEO
Picture courtesy of California Bank of Commerce

The local community of smaller banks has been able to avoid most of the mortgage loans and swaps that have hurt their larger counterparts. They run a simpler business, know their clients well, and lend back to them, in what is more or less a closed system.

Recent earnings statements are reassuring.

Mechanics Bank is a family owned institution which, according to D.D. Felton, Vice-Chairman of the Board, "has spent 104 years being very conservative." The great grand daughter of founder E.M. Downer believes that this is the reason why her bank is so well positioned to face the tough times ahead. Last week the Orinda resident visited the 33 offices of the bank, located from Napa, to the East Bay to San Francisco, with one in each of our Lamorinda cities. They all reported a rise in deposits, and number of customers. Felton attributes the growth to the partnerships that have been built over the long term with their customers. This knowledge has allowed the bank to mitigate risk and as a result enjoys a 5-Star rating with Bauer Financial.*

California Bank of Commerce cannot boast such a long history. It was founded a little more than a year ago in Lafayette, but it is just as pleased with the growth of its business. Total Assets were up by 20% over the end of the second quarter, 2008. Total Loans grew 45% and Total Deposits grew 19% over the same period.

"Margins continue to be under pressure," says John Rossell, President and CEO of the Bank, "the Federal Reserve is pushing rates down and controlling the prime rate, and so community banks lend at prime, meaning that our earning side is weakening." This affects banks all over the country and Rossell believes that California Bank's unique approach has preserved them from the common fate. "The bank is safe and still growing, we live on Main Street not on Wall Street," adds Russell, who is happy with the latest results especially the good growth for loans and deposits. The Bank has no problem serving the borrowing demands of their customers, mostly commercial and industrial companies who borrow from one to four million dollars.

We find the same generally positive situation at the Union Bank of California. The bank, a subsidiary of the Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, with offices concentrated in California and local branches in Moraga and Orinda, announced in its third quarter statement a growth of total revenue from \$721 million this quarter, up 13 percent compared with third quarter 2007 and a decrease of its net income from \$127.5 million a year earlier to \$104.8 million this quarter.

At Union's Moraga branch, Dimitry Bokman, the Branch Manager, reports good results. The bank has not been involved in risky mortgage operations and they strive to be local partners. "We cater to the needs of individuals and businesses on a one on one basis," says Bokman, "we actually pick-up the phone when people call us." A significant

percentage of his business customers are professional services which do not seem to be experiencing extreme difficulty at this time. Bokman has not noticed any new trends in the credit requirement of his customers and the bank is able to continue its philanthropic efforts: They gave \$2,500 for Moraga's summer concerts in the park and are sponsoring "Kids' Day" with the police department on November 15th that aims to fingerprint all elementary school students. The bank will give \$1,000 to schools at which at least 70% of the students participate.

The question is how the banks' situation will hold if the recession persists and how they will support their clients. "Our customers have already been in a recession for seven months," says Rossell, "but their financials are still sound and we don't have one delinquent loan." The CEO wants to remain a participant in the economy, whatever the downturn, "There is a temptation to not process any more loan," he adds, "but our Board of Directors doesn't want that, we want to bring in new deposits, and we won't freeze borrowing."

"We have been working side by side with our clients in good and bad times in the past," adds Felton, "we see the coming times as very tough and we will stick with the fundamentals that have made us successful: pricing for risk, having reserves, saving."

*Bauer Financial compiles financial data for U.S. banks and thrifts from call report data as reported to federal regulators. The web site is www.bauerfinancial.com, 5 Stars is the highest rating.

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