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Orinda Medicine Shoppe and Lafayette Bookstore: Two Businesses Competing With Big Boxes Honored

By Sophie Braccini



Alan Wong discuss supplements with customer Edith Black



Asma Abu-Taleb, Linda Grana and Dave Simpson

Alan Wong and Dave Simpson may never have crossed paths before they met at the Contra Costa Council's 10th Annual Small Business Awards Luncheon, on May 7th at the Concord Hilton. Though they operate in very different markets, medication and books, the award nominees from Orinda and Lafayette, respectively, have both chosen the individual entrepreneurship path in markets dominated by big brands. These businesses, honored by their respective Chambers of Commerce, represent the uniqueness and creativity of our communities; they make shopping downtown Orinda or Lafayette a unique experience, as opposed to so many other communities in which the shopping experience is limited to interchangeable malls with identical stores.

Alan Wong's Medicine Shoppe is located in the Orinda Village Square, near the Orinda Book-

store and McCaulou's. After being a pharmacist for Rite Aid and Walgreen's, Wong decided to open his own pharmacy in 2000. Entering his shop is like stepping into an old world apothecary store, where unique compounds are made and you can actually ask a pharmacist for advice. "When he first opened his shop, he was pleased to provide custom compounding for his customers to create medicines that were not available commercially," says Orinda Chamber President Sue Breedlove, noting, "The friendly atmosphere of The Medicine Shoppe makes going to pick up a prescription an enjoyable venture. Alan has tremendous knowledge and is extraordinarily helpful and generous with his time."

Edith Black, who has been bringing her prescriptions to the Medicine Shoppe since its inception, agrees wholeheartedly. "Mr. Wong will go out of his way to help

you," she said, "he knows me, what my needs are and he can give me advice." Wong agrees that advice is a strong part of his job, even though he calls it a normal part of the relationship that he has established with his customers. "My customers are like family, they come here with their children and the best part is when the kids do not want to leave." Wong says that a lot of the advice he gives has to do with drug interactions, or hormone replacement therapy for which he sometimes prepares specific compounds. "The level of service of the Medicine Shoppe is what will keep you returning and referring your friends and family to Alan's," adds Breedlove.

Dave Simpson of the Lafayette Bookstore thrives on the same concept of customer service. Linda Grana, the store manager, and Aleks Sedzielarz, the used book manager, help him in his work. "I

was once told that the key to success was to hire people smarter than oneself," said Simpson, "that is what I have done." This year the Lafayette Chamber honors a business and a man that have succeeded in a terribly competitive market. "When 'big box' stores were eating independent book stores for lunch, Dave not only built a very successful business, quadrupling Lafayette Book Store's sales, he also carried the torch to help teach our community the importance of shopping local," said Lafayette Chamber Executive Director Jay Lifson, "His leadership and innovation have always been a driving force in Lafayette and in his industry."

In addition to expertise and customer service, there are other secrets to Simpson's success. First, there's his off-site custom bookstore event program. "We go to specific fairs and events and set up a themed bookstore made for that specific occasion," explains Simpson. In a large three-day long event he makes as much money as in a month and a half at the brick and mortar store in Lafayette. The second secret is his online used bookstore that reaches an international market and allows him to buy esoteric used books in Lafayette because he knows that somewhere in the world, someone will want it.

At this time, the lease on Simpson's store in the Clocktower Building on Mt. Diablo Boulevard is up. "We are negotiating with Main Street Property for renewal," said Simpson, "We are not sure that we will be in the same location come August."

business briefs

New Skin Care Spa in Orinda

50 Washell Way, Suite 230, 258-0055, www.med-estheticsrx.com

On Friday May 21st, at noon, the Orinda Chamber of Commerce will cut the red inaugural ribbon at Elizabeth Buddington's Med EstheticsRx. Buddington recently opened her skin care spa a block from Theatre Square, in downtown Orinda. A certified medical esthetician, she offers a wide variety of skin treatments aimed at promoting health and beauty. The treatments available include Peels, Skin Care 101 (introduction to skin care for young adults), Express Cleansing Treatment, and Healthy Glow. A variety of skin care products are available including Biopelle, elta MD, La Roche-Posay and SkinCeuticals.

Nominate Your Favorite Woman Entrepreneur in Lamorinda

Women's Initiative for Self Employment, one of the largest microenterprise training organizations in the country, is now accepting nominations for its 2010 Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards. The awards seek to recognize women entrepreneurs in who demonstrate the following:

- Have been successful despite the barriers that exist for woman business owners
- Exemplify how business ownership and leadership is beneficial for women and their families
- Have a positive impact on the local community
- Advance their business through innovation.

A Leadership Committee from each region will determine the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year based on information provided by the nominee. Winners will be announced in August and honored at one of five regional award celebrations in October. Deadline for nominations is May 31. For more information and to nominate a woman entrepreneur, go to www.womensinitiative.org. Since 1988, Women's Initiative has been assisting high-potential low-income women who dream of business ownership.

Jan Gunn Honored by ASID

134 Diablo View Road, Orinda, 254-6570, www.designfinder.com/gunn

The NorCal Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) is honoring Jan Gunn, Interior Architect and Designer, as a featured designer. Gunn opened her Bay Area interior design firm in Orinda in 1983. Her special area of expertise is creating remarkable bathrooms. "Through her innovative design sense and with the use of unusual materials, Ms. Gunn makes each bathroom a joy to embrace," says the ASID, "In one instance, she placed an overscale operable glass skylight over a tub, which was hewn out of a single piece of Carrera marble. In another she cantilevered the marble seat in a shower outside the shower to serve as a sculpture platform. Another bathroom has a replica of Ursa Major in twinkling fiber optic cable on the ceiling."

News from the three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

- Taste of Lafayette, Tuesday, May 18th. The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and the Lafayette Community Foundation are once again teaming up for a great night out on the town. "Taste of Lafayette" is a tour of Lafayette's finest eateries that lets you sample the signature cuisine of each restaurant. The event begins in Lafayette Plaza at 5:30 p.m. where you will check in, listen to music provided by Red House Studios, and a raffle that will raise money for the projects that the Lafayette Community Foundation will fund. Next you can stroll down Lafayette's Restaurant Row on Mt. Diablo Blvd. or board the shuttle bus that will take you up and down the boulevard. 15-20 local restaurants and catering companies will be participating. At each stop, comes another "taste." Finally, participants gather back in the park to pick up their auction items and enjoy coffee and dessert. Proceeds from the event benefit the Lafayette Community Foundation and the Services and Programs of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. Tickets for the event and raffle tickets are available through the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, located at 100 Lafayette Circle, Suite 103. Visit our website at www.lafayettechamber.org or call 284-7404.
- May 19th at noon, Green Committee open meeting at the Chamber of Commerce office.
- May 20 at 8:30 a.m., Entrepreneur Club at the Chamber of Commerce office.

Moraga

- The Moraga Business Person of the Year Award ceremony will be held at Terzetto Cuisine on Monday, June 28, 2010 at 6:00 PM. Mechanics Bank is sponsoring this event by inviting the members of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce to be their guests for dinner at Terzetto's. The first order of business is to select the Moraga Business Person of the Year. Here are the criteria: A Moraga Business Person of the Year would: Practice good business strategies, support the Moraga community, serve as a good business role model, have good customer relationships, demonstrate ethical business practices. Please email your selection to Yelena Mucovich, globalsecuritysystems@juno.com; be sure to list the reasons you have for selecting this person.
- General Chamber meeting on Friday May 21 from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. at the Hacienda de las Flores.

Orinda

- Friday, May 14th, Chamber Luncheon from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Orinda Country Club, 315 Camino Sobrante. Guest Speaker: Gus Kramer, County Assessor, will present: "Discover what is involved in assessing our property." Cost: \$30.00. Please call 925-254-3909 for reservations.
- Orinda Chamber web site gets new interactive calendar: Chamber President Sue Breedlove initiated the concept of having an interactive online calendar of Chamber and community events so all can easily access it and even add events to their own calendars. By scrolling through the coming months (using the little arrows at the top left of the calendar), you'll find a wealth of information. The calendar is maintained by Candy Kattenburg using the self-edit technology built in.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com