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Students' Discretionary Money Supports the Local Economy

By Sophie Braccini

Matt Carroll is a generous man. The General Manager of Sodexo Dining Services on the St. Mary's College campus, he is sharing the money students spend on food with local restaurants. He may lose some of his revenue, but he says that the program, called 'Off Campus Solution' is a way to give students more variety in their food choices. "It also strengthens ties with the community," adds Carroll, "it gives everybody a share of the pie."

How does it work? When they enroll at Saint Mary's College (SMC), students choose a meal plan. These plans include a certain amount of 'Flex-Dollars' that are recorded on their meal card. Students can now use their cards off-campus in the establishments that have signed an agreement with SMC. The program is managed by a branch of Sodexo called Off

Campus Solution (OCS).

"This is our first year for OCS at Saint Mary's," says Carroll, "so we started with five or six places to see how the program goes." OCS manages such plans in many college towns all over the country, and, according to Carroll, some 1500 establishments are participating.

To choose the first restaurants, Carroll met with student focus groups and made sure that the partners in the program were already supporters of the SMC athletic program.

As of today, five businesses are part of the program – Pennini's Ristorante Italiano, Terzetto Cuisine, Loard's Ice Cream and Mountain Mike's Pizza in Moraga; and Chipotle Mexican Grill in Walnut Creek. Subway in Moraga had been contacted but declined to participate.

"We pay a 10% fee to the program," explains Patrick Vahey, owner of Pennini's, "I usually give a 10% discount to SMC students, so for those who use the card we just transfer the 10%." Vahey reports about \$1000 in extra income from the program since it began two months ago.

Roos Pal, of Terzetto, says she has seen more students coming in and she hopes it will become more consistent. "It's not hard for my employees to manage," she adds, "Off Campus Solution gave us a credit card machine that's dedicated to that program, that costs us \$30 a month."

"It has been working for us," states Denise Manz, manager of the Loard's store that recently moved from Rheem to the Moraga Center, "we've had more students coming in and using their card since the beginning of the school year." Manz

was not able to confirm if the increased business was due solely to the card and/or to their new location.

SMC student Lindsay Verber thinks her fellow students are interested in the program. "Sometimes students like to off campus and get a different type of food," she says, "it's fun to go to Pennini's and order a calzone or treat yourself to ice cream at Loard's."

"This is a win-win operation, we're glad Saint Mary's could make it happen," says Moraga Chamber President Edy Schwartz. Carroll will wait a year to see the outcome of the program and then consider its extension. He was the one going door to door to recruit the first business participants; he expects to be contacted by others as the program grows.

business briefs

MEF Thanks Businesses Partners

The Moraga Education Foundation (MEF) recently sent an email blast to parents encouraging them to support the local businesses that have made a continuing effort to support the educational foundation. "We are a close knit community," says MEF President Diana Obrand, "we depend on each other and we have to work together. Businesses support our schools because they know that the quality of education attracts families that will make them successful. In turn parents need to shop locally to support the local business community." The effort did not stop with an email. "All our business partners are listed on our website," Obrand continues, "We are not an advertising firm, but if we can communicate with our parents, it helps, and when I walk into a store that has an MEF sticker in their windows, it makes me feel good to support that business."

Farmyard Darling's Holiday Champagne Reception

December 9th, 5-8p.m., Farmyard Darlings, a vintage collectibles company, will be unveiling many one-of-a-kind treasures including whimsical gifts of sterling silver once used on luxury cruise liners, steamer trunks from the late 1890's, Western ephemera, vintage signs, cherry picking ladders, stunning pieces of leather luggage, and unique kitchen china, and many, many other goodies. The inaugural reception will be held at Mt. Diablo Nursery's Harry's House (owners: Marcia & Garth Jacober), 3295 Mount Diablo Boulevard (adjacent to Lafayette Park Hotel). The sale will continue throughout the weekend, 12/10-12/12. Farmyard Darlings was founded in 2010 by Lafayette residents Kim Berry & Carole Sinclair.

Same Service, New Location for Smith's Shoe Repair

After 28 years in the Clocktower Building, Madison "Matt" Smith, proprietor of Smith's Shoe Repair, has moved to a new location between McCaulou's and the future Whole Foods Market on the rear walkway – directly behind Blue Ginko and the Yogurt Shack. Unfortunately, looking to keep up a "clean professional image," Craig Semmelmeier, Principal of Main Street Property Services, is unable to put a sign up at the old location directing customers to the new location. "We love the shoe repair business," said Semmelmeier, "we would like to see them do well."



Matt Smith at the new location of Smith's Shoe Repair Photo Cathy Tyson

Free Seminar – Lowering Small Business Taxes Sponsored by the Moraga Chamber of Commerce

"The Small Business Jobs Act has many new provisions, some of which may reduce tax bills, but only if you act on them in the next few weeks,"

says Peggy Hall, EA in Moraga. Hall, along with colleague Mark Bole, proposes a free class to teach business owners how to keep more cash out of the government's hands. The seminar is scheduled on Tuesday November 30, 6:45-8pm, at Aegis of Moraga, 950 Country Club Drive. Please RSVP to Halloftaxes@gmail.com or call 388-1040.

A Sales Associate of a Different Stripe

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage announced that Tran Turner has joined the company as a sales associate in its Orinda office. Prior to joining Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, Turner worked as a curator of architecture and design in the art museum field, and as a writer and editor for magazine and book publishers. Turner completed an intensive training program through the Chamberlain Real Estate School, which emphasized the principles and techniques of real estate. Turner's expertise in the history of architecture and design can help clients who are interested in architecturally-designed properties and historic homes. He may be reached at the Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage office in Orinda, located at 5 Moraga Way, (925)253-4600 or (925)395-7588, or via e-mail at Tran.Turner@cbnrcal.com

News from the three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette Chamber of Commerce

Office Closed for Thanksgiving Holiday from noon on November 24; will reopen on November 26.

Holiday Mixer on Wednesday December 8, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Join fellow Chamber members and friends for the traditional Holiday Mixer at Douglass Designs' new location at 3586 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Moraga Chamber of Commerce

Holiday Party on Tuesday, December 7, from 7:00 to 10 pm. This year the annual Chamber Holiday Party will be held at Moraga Royale, 1600 Canyon Road. Chamber members and their guests, RSVP by Thursday Dec. 3rd to kathenelson@gmail.com. The evening will see the conclusion of the "Festival of Trees", a silent auction of decorated Christmas trees, to support Rescue One Foundation, the organization that aids MOFD paramedics. Viewing and bidding hours are from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. daily starting on December 1st at Moraga Royale. The bidding will conclude at 9 p.m. on the 7th. Trees will be delivered the next day to winners residing in Lamorinda.

Orinda Chamber of Commerce

Holiday Mixer on Thursday, December 9, from 5:30 to 7:00pm. The Chamber invites its members and their guests to come for the traditional Holiday Mixer held this year at Citibank, 37 Orinda Way.

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

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