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# Belly Dancing for Fun and Fitness

By Sophie Braccini

The vibe was light and festive in Samira Dawn's studio last Friday night, as Ladies' Night Out unfolded. Samira Dawn (Dawn Morrison), in glamorous belly dance attire, got the 15 or so women who came that night to loosen up and start having fun while learning the first techniques of belly dancing. Giggling, dancing, expressing their inner sensuality, the women had a blast in the non-judgmental and supportive atmosphere of the new studio Morrison opened at the beginning of August in Lafayette.

"We left our husbands and kids at home and we came to just have fun among us girls," said Wendy Hershey, who after hearing about Shimmy Dreams Studio had invited six friends to join her for the night. The ladies in the room that night ranged in age from their 30s to mid-60s; two or three were dancers who had worked with different techniques and some had not exercised in a while. "Belly

dancing is for women of all ages and sizes," said Morrison. "You can dance and feel beautiful at whatever stage of your life you're in."

Morrison's story with belly dancing is a bit unusual. When in school, she trained as a synchronized swimmer with the Walnut Creek Aquanauts. She was on the U.S. National Team and reached a pre-Olympic level before an injured shoulder crushed her dreams. Shortly after ending her swimming career she was dazzled by a group of belly dancers at a party. "I was drawn to the artistry, sensuality and confidence with which they performed," said Morrison. "But what really left me in awe was that each woman who enchanted me was unique. They were real women of every age, shape, size, color, and ability. And each one radiated with confidence, sensuality, and beauty."

Morrison immediately started taking classes and receiving private coaching, and now the mother of two

young children has been belly dancing professionally for 14 years. She was the co-director of Dansoleil Belly Dance Studio in Brentwood several years ago and has performed regularly at eight different restaurants in the East Bay.

Opening the studio in Lafayette is a new and exciting step for her. She teaches different levels of belly dance, a class for pre-teens, cardio belly dance for those who want the extra work-out, and she organizes Ladies' Night Out.

During Ladies' Night Out, after sharing food and drinks and seeing Samira Dawn perform a short program, the ladies draped hip scarves and coin belts, removed their shoes and started following the teacher's instructions.

Guided by the lustful rhythm of Oriental music, they twirled, shook, did the belly roll, the Egyptian hip movement, adding arm actions, soft body waves, creating a dance, some-



Dawn Morrison guides a group of women during Ladies' Night Out at her Shimmy Dreams Studio. Photo Sophie Braccini

times a bit clumsy – most were beginners – but always with good humor. As the night progressed, the women started to let their bodies guide them, and began to express their inner grace.

"The focus of the studio is to encourage, motivate, and build women's self-esteem," said Morrison. "I am also a fitness professional who teaches exercise classes at four local gyms. So I will be helping women realize their fitness and health goals as

well as showing them, through belly dance, how beautiful they really are."

Shimmy Dreams Belly Dance Studio is located at 1018 Almanor Lane, off Mt. Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette. For information, call (925) 984-8213 or visit [www.shimmy-dreams.com](http://www.shimmy-dreams.com).

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

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## business briefs

**New Chef at Metro Lafayette**  
3524 Mount Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette  
(925) 284-4422

Steve Jaramillo, a 20-year veteran of Bay Area kitchens, has joined Metro as executive chef. Jaramillo was formerly executive chef at L'alime's in Berkeley and the opening chef at Fonda, both SF Chronicle three-star, Top 100 restaurants. Jaramillo previously worked at such notable restaurants as Mark Miller's 4th Street Grill and Christopher's Cafe. Jaramillo's rustic cuisine reflects the seasons with an emphasis on the use of local, organic produce and sustainable, humanely-raised meats and fish. Jaramillo will oversee the kitchens of both Metro Lafayette and Metro Montclair, located in Montclair Village.

**New Recycling Services, CCCSWA Wants your Input**  
The Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority, which manages garbage, recycling and green waste programs for Lafayette and other central county communities, is entering a new franchise period. New services and providers will be evaluated by the Agency during a period that will end with new services being contracted by the end of 2014. The agency is hosting a series of public workshops to get input from businesses and residents about current and potential future solid waste and recycling programs. For Lamorinda, the workshop is scheduled from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. September 13 at the Orinda Community Center, 28, Orinda Way. To attend a workshop email [Authority@wastediversion.org](mailto:Authority@wastediversion.org).

**News from the three Chambers of Commerce Lafayette**  
September Mixer from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, September 5 at Mechanics Bank, 3640 Mt. Diablo Blvd. Havana Restaurant will be bringing its Mojito Bar to make this mixer extra festive.

Shop Lafayette meeting at noon Tuesday, September 11 in the Lafayette Chamber Conference Room.

The 17th Annual Lafayette Art and Wine Festival (with music, too) will take over Downtown Lafayette on Saturday and Sunday, September 15 and 16. It is still time to volunteer and have fun with your fellow Chamber members and neighbors. For more information, see article on page A10 or contact the Chamber.

Ribbon cutting at 5 p.m. September 13 for the new office grand opening of Pacific Union Real Estate, 201 Lafayette Circle #100.

Social Media Strategies Workshop Series by Robin Fox. Learn about Personal Branding in a LinkedIn World Wednesday, September 19 starting at 8 a.m. in the Lafayette Library Art and Science Classroom. Online registration at [bit.ly/LafayetteChamber](http://bit.ly/LafayetteChamber). Free for Moraga and Lafayette Chamber members.

**Moraga**  
Chamber regular members' meeting starting at 7:30 a.m. with coffee and muffins, followed by the month's discussion topic from 8 to 9 a.m. Friday, September 28 at the Hacienda de las Flores.

**Orinda**  
Fifth Annual Orinda Restaurant Tour from 5 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, September 18 in the Theatre District of downtown Orinda, conducted by the Orinda Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Educational Foundation of Orinda (EFO, a non-profit organization committed to providing financial support for quality educational and enrichment programs for Orinda's public schools). For more information, see article on pg. A10.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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