

Local Designer Has Business in the Bag

By Moya Stone



The Cass Clutch purses will be available online soon after Debra Szidon's Kickstarter campaign ends. Photo provided

Lafayette resident Debra Szidon says that she didn't know a thing about the fashion business or marketing. But that wasn't going to stop the interior designer and mother of three from launching her own line of handbags.

Starting with a vintage purse for inspiration, Szidon began learning a new business over a year ago and now is unveiling a Kickstarter campaign to help fund the first in a series of vintage-style handbags.

It started several years ago when Szidon, who has "always had a thing for vintage items," bought a 1970s clutch handbag from a San Francisco consignment shop.

What attracted her to this particular bag was its shape, versatility, and the patina of age. Brown suede with a leather trim, the rectangle handbag folds over and can be sported as a clutch or carried by the inset handles. It's big enough to be a tote or used as a chic briefcase.

"I've even used it for groceries," says Szidon, who made it her daily go-to purse. "Every time I used this bag everyone — young and old — loved it." All the compliments she received inspired Szidon to recreate the handbag.

Having grown up in New Jersey with a father who restored 1950s and '60s cars, Szidon appreciates the idea of what she calls "restoration from old to new." She imagined

a new life for the vintage styling of her favored bag.

Still, there were many daunting tasks ahead. Szidon had to learn the business of purse manufacturing and fashion marketing.

"I had to teach myself about leather," she says. She started with cobblers and then a friend who makes her own handbags made the first prototypes for Szidon and introduced her to local companies that deal in tanned hides. From there she found SVEN, a leather handbag design company in Berkeley. They created the main pattern and are ready to manufacture her line locally, which is important to Szidon.

Now it's time to market the bag Szidon is calling The Cass Clutch and raise funds to start production. Enter Kickstarter, the popular crowdsourcing platform that raises not only funds, but also awareness. Although there is already a waiting list for The Cass Clutch, the Kickstarter campaign will get the word out as well as confirm for Szidon the extent of interest in her product.

Starting just last December, Szidon quickly learned how Kickstarter works. "It's like a whole other business," she says. As a marketing tool, part of Kickstarter is to have

a polished video that tells a story. Even though she knew the story she wanted to tell, she needed help. Szidon hired a video team that had Kickstarter experience. "It wasn't just about the film — I needed guidance in building the campaign."

Local friends helped too, volunteering for the video the use of a mid-century home and a classic convertible car from the late 60s, all contributing to the retro-California vibe Szidon wanted.

Szidon says that she doesn't think she'd come this far with the project if she were not in California. "People here are really supportive with networking and collaboration. It's so present and welcoming ... California definitely has that spirit."

The Kickstarter campaign launched in March and runs until April 18. After that, Szidon will go into production with The Cass Clutch and sell initially online.

For information on the Kickstarter program for The Cass Clutch, visit <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1432071361/the-cass-clutch-a-vintage-inspired-handbag>.

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

business briefs

Bill Sullivan Named Moraga's Employee of the Month

Bill Sullivan, the Director of Scheduling and Special Events at St. Mary's College, has been named the Moraga Employee of the Month for March.

Sullivan oversees the scheduling and execution of hundreds of events and promotions at the college each year and makes sure all the needs are met with professionalism.

"Bill is a wonderful ambassador of our college," said Vice Provost of Enrollment and Communications for SMC, Hernan Bucheli. "He handles so many events and always finds way to solve scheduling issues and special requests when they pop up."

In winning the award, the Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce will award Sullivan a gift card to Safeway as well as a gift card to Ristorante Amoroma in Moraga. Sullivan will be presented with his



Roger Gregory, Rotary President, Bill Sullivan, Hernan Bucheli, Provost Saint Mary's College. Photo provided

award and gifts at an upcoming Moraga Rotary lunch at the college.

"Paths to Success" Business Forum

The Lamorinda Business Forum Presents "Paths to Success" from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. on April 20, in the Lamorinda Music "Big Room" Theatre, Downtown Lafayette.

This lively panel discussion features three Lafayette brick-and-mortar business owners whose businesses have thrived by taking unique paths. The featured speakers are Tom Stenzel of Venture Quality Goods (opened 2012), Carole Sinclair of Farmyard Darlings (opened 2010, second location opened 2015 and) Colleen McCormick of Lamorinda Music (opened 2009).

"We chose these three business owners thoughtfully," says Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Lafayette Chamber, who is serving as moderator for the panel. "Each has succeeded because they have found a way to differentiate their business in a competitive market (even during the recession), identify their ideal target customers and communicate to them effectively."

In addition to attracting local customers, each of these businesses has succeeded by attracting customers outside of Lamorinda, too. It helps that they each offer great products, merchandise them well, and deliver excellent customer service.

"I love that they all live in Lafayette, too," says Lifson. "We can each learn something from them that will help our own business, including the Chamber."

The event is free and open to the public, but space is limited. RSVP recommended. Presented by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. Visit <http://bit.ly/lamorindabizforum> for tickets and information.

From the Chambers Lafayette

A Ribbon Cutting celebration will be held at 5 p.m. on Thursday, April

28 at the Tail Haven Hotel & Day Lounge, 3399 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

A Ribbon Cutting celebration will be held at 5 p.m. May 26 for Oakbay Chiropractic-Lamorinda, located at 1080 Carol Lane in Lafayette.

Moraga

The Entrepreneurs Lunch Series continues at 12 p.m. on Monday, April 11, at the home/made kitchen cafe & bakery, 337 Rheem Blvd. Cost is \$10.

This month's topic is "Mentoring: for the Mentee and Mentor," and will feature an interactive discussion with Jim Carlson from SCORE. Carlson has over 20 years of various sales leadership positions at Fortune 100 technology companies, where he successfully led Global OEM account teams. He has experience developing new markets as well as owning and selling his own company. Jim has participated in formal Mentor programs for over 10 years.

Open to both members and non-members. RSVP required to kathe@moragachamber.org.

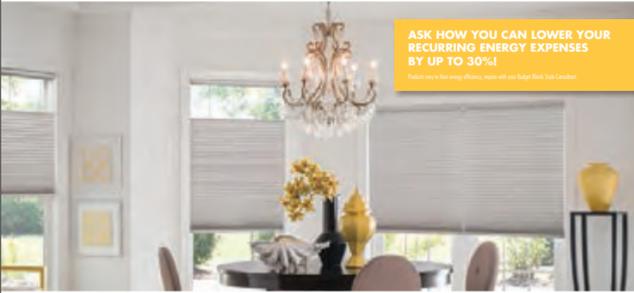
The monthly Chamber Mixer will be held at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 19, at Bullfrog Creek Vineyard, 35 Hansen Ct. in Moraga. Hosts are Bullfrog Creek, Hall of Taxes and Hollie Felts-Howell.

Orinda

The Orinda Chamber of Commerce and the Orinda Rotary present the Orinda Trivia Bee on Friday, April 29 at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 66 St. Stephens Dr. Orinda. Cost is \$360 per team (up to six people per team), which includes a family style dinner. Doors open at 5 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m. and the game begins at 7 p.m. sharp. Winners take a cash prize for the nonprofit of their choice. Reserve a table quickly, as only 16 tables are available. To purchase a table go to orindachamber.org, call 254-3909 or email info@orindachamber.org.

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International Compost Awareness Week May 1-7

GET SMART SATURDAY—COMPOSTSMART Annual Compost Giveaway

Saturday, May 7 from 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

- **Registration Required:** This year we're partnering with the UC Master Gardeners of Contra Costa to bring residents our second Annual Compost Giveaway, along with presentations, booths, raffles and more! Visit the event registration online for schedule! <http://getsmartsaturday-compostsmart.eventbrite.com>
- **Remember to bring** your own rigid containers: no bags, no vehicles!
- **Take up to 96-gallons** (while supplies last) of compost, made from your green cart Organics!
- **Garden troubles?** Visit the "Ask a Master Gardener" booth.



Free kitchen food scraps containers



Buy a discounted Soilsaver Compost Bin!

CCMG "Our Garden" at the corner of Shadelands and N. Wiget, Walnut Creek



www.RecycleSmart.org

If you're participating in the compost giveaway, Soilsaver Bin sales, or taking a kitchen food scraps container, bring proof of residence: Walnut Creek, Orinda, Lafayette, Moraga, Danville, Alamo, Blackhawk and Diablo.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com