

Acalanes students will work for college

By John T. Miller



From left, Acalanes students Clay Schmidt and Jeremy Ridge.

Photo John T. Miller

A pair of enterprising students from Acalanes High School has formed a business partnership focused on providing needed labor to community members, while also helping to fund their college educations.

Clay Schmidt came up with the idea near the beginning of his junior year after hearing from a couple of friends who had been working all summer. He texted his friend, Jeremy Ridge, and wondered if they could advertise and find enough part time work for themselves and their friends to save for college.

The cofounders, along with a core group of eight fellow students that have known each other since Stanley Middle School, are extremely busy with their classes, sports, and extra curricular activities, yet they still have more than enough energy to take on part-time jobs in their spare time to try and stash away money for their future educations.

"We've generally been able to work about eight hours every weekend," says Schmidt, "but it's really hard to find any spare hours during the week."

That's understandable. Both Schmidt and Ridge take three Honors or Advanced Placement courses each, maintain nearly perfect 4.0 GPAs while also participating in athletic activities. Schmidt plays football and tennis and Ridge is a

top wrestler for the Dons.

Residents may have noticed door hanger advertisements, billing the group as "Local Helpers." The flier, along with word-of-mouth and a steady perusal of the Nextdoor Saranap website, has generated enough work to keep the group of students busy.

"We can do anything from manual labor, to baby sitting, to tech help or tutoring," says Schmidt. He mentioned that \$15 an hour is their suggested rate, but the client is encouraged to pay them what they are worth. "Sometimes we make mistakes, but we're willing to come back another day and make it right."

"Our goal is to work within the community and provide needed services to the people who live here, while also raising money for our own college education," added Ridge.

The two don't make any money for farming out work to others, but rather are glad to facilitate matching the community's needs with their friends' expertise.

Both Schmidt and Ridge give credit to their computer science teacher at Acalanes, Daniel Appel, for helping them to acquire the skills to make their undertaking a reality.

"We were given skills in his class that helped us create this business," said Schmidt, who is inter-

ested in pursuing software engineering and robotics in college.

Speaking of his students, Appel said, "Jeremy and Clay are the type who only need to see something once and then are off and running. After building simple websites in our AP Computer Science Principles course, they developed a personal website on their own. They did this based on their desire to improve the local community, and didn't receive any academic credit for it. I hope more students use computer science like Jeremy and Clay have done where local communities directly benefit."

Ridge, who hopes to go to an Ivy League college or perhaps Stanford, sees the enterprise as developing good relationships with community members. "A lot of older people need help in the garden, or in moving boxes. Sometimes their own child moves away and they need somebody to fill in."

The two will continue their endeavor through their senior year, but hope the idea will sustain itself. "When we're gone we hope it's not over," said Schmidt. "We hope that we can kick it down a year and someone else will carry it on."

To contact Local Helpers, their website is at local-helpers.neocities.org or call (925) 285-5229. Their email is local.helpers175@gmail.com.

Two Lamorinda businesses honored with CoolCalifornia Small Business Awards

By Sophie Braccini



Middle and right, Sal and Susan Captain.



The California Air Resources Board recently honored 13 California businesses for their remarkable practices as they surpassed others in their energy and water resources conservation, and in the optimization of their sustainable practices.

Among thousands of small California businesses from which the 13 were selected, two are from Lamorinda: Lafayette Car Wash And Detail Center and Captain Vineyards in Moraga. The business owners explain how their practices come from their desire to minimize their carbon footprint, and are also good for their bottom line.

Sal Captain and his wife Susan have been producing wine in Moraga for years. They are a recognized

Contra Costa Green Business and have been honored often for their dry farming and organic practice of growing grapes.

Sal Captain says that reducing the greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impacts is natural to them. The winemaker was raised in England where being thrifty regarding use of electricity and water was simply the way of life. He and his wife joke on how inspectors can't get over the fact that they use so little water, and have been checking their water meter many times for malfunction. What they have done is train their vines to live on very little water, growing deep roots. They believe that what people say about their wines and their intense taste and color comes from the dry farming.

The Captains, along with Blake Wallen at Lafayette Car Wash, explain that they had to fill up a very lengthy questionnaire to compete for the award. They had to answer questions about their practices over time of course, but also about their employees, where they were coming from and how much travel they had to complete to come to work.

Wallen explains that most of the workers at the Lafayette Car Wash are families from the area that have been working with them for many years. The car wash is well known for recycling the water that is used to clean the cars. What is less known is that all the electrical apparatus used in the business such as the vacuums use less electricity.

Wallen adds that the desire to do their part for the environment is certainly a motivation for his family, but that it also makes sense from a financial viewpoint.

The businesses were honored in Sacramento on March 20 during an official ceremony. CARB Chair Mary D. Nichols said that the award winners were the best examples of how more and more Californian small businesses are making smart, climate-friendly choices.

"From Arcata to Los Angeles, from a craft distillery to a window and solar panel cleaning service, small businesses throughout the state are showing that environmental protection and innovation are also good for the bottom line," she said. More information at www.arb.ca.gov.