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Lafayette Chamber names Hollie Lucas-Alcalay Business Person of the Year

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Hollie Lucas-Alcalay in her store Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

of Lafayette Business Person of the Year.

On a rainy, cold Saturday morning in downtown Lafayette, Hollie Lucas-Alcalay's shop -Hollie's Homegrown - is warm and cozy as a handful of new customers trickle in and check out the wine and cheese sampling menus and the freshly made products throughout the store and return customers replenish their seasoning salt supply. In the background, Lucas-Alcalay and her colleague are making rose geranium based essential oils, herb infused honey and flavored sugar.

"I have a small herb farm in Moraga and I grow a lot of culinary and medicinal herbs and body products. Almost every day we're making. In addition to my things, we have over 30 local artisans here with candles, jewelry, textiles, books and a rotation of featured wall artists," Lucas-Alcalay explains while giving an overview of what her store has to offer. "You can also have tea here or come in on Friday, Saturday or Sunday for fresh focaccia bread made by an Italian Moraga family and do an olive oil or honey tasting. We offer local chocolates, cookies and other goodies on dessert platters and cheese tastings."

It's perhaps her heartfelt personal back story, paired with creativity, a desire to create special, memorable experiences for customers and a product line that meets customer needs that earned Hollie Lucas-Alcalay the title

Lucas-Alcalay helped her dad, a longtime grape grower, open two tasting rooms 25 years ago and says that's how she modeled her store, with the idea of supporting local agriculture. She says her little corner shop offers people a little reprieve or mini-outing for those who simply don't want to go to Napa. Those looking to indulge in some self-care can try out Lucas-Alcalay's handcrafted herb infused skin care products or care for sore muscles, a skin rash or even irritated skin of a pet.

"The common thread of all of this is my whole-hearted belief that it's really important that we support a local, creative economy. Without having a platform for makers and growers and crafters or a place to sell all of this, we lose it," Lucas-Alcalay says. "I remember noticing the abundance of things being imported from non-local or intercontinental sources. The environmentalist in me couldn't help thinking about the carbon footprint. I'm not naive to think that we're taking over Amazon. All I'm asking is maybe every 10th purchase people consider making a purchase with us and their money can go back to the community."

Before starting her own business in the center of downtown Lafayette, Lucas-Alcalay had a multipage resume which included working in politics on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., doing environmental, healthcare advocacy and conservation work, serving as the director of communications for an environmental agency and working in her family's wine business. Ultimately, it was her desire to do work that allowed her to be with her kids and turn her passion into a sustainable business that drove her.

"I absolutely love doing this work, but the goal was always to make money comparable to what I made. It wasn't optional. I had two kids and there wasn't an alternative," Lucas-Alcalay says. "It was hard to be 42 and have people pat me on the head and say this was cute (when it was my career)."

Even though Lucas-Alcalay's business is doing well as a local fixture now, she endured some growing pains and learned some important lessons along the way. Her first year in business, she recalls selling or trying to sell 11 varieties of basil. "It was my dream garden, but people didn't know how to do anything with it and they didn't buy it," Lucas-Alcalay recalls. Feeling somewhat defeated, she talked with a marketing manager who suggested she bring out her dehydrated herbs and put them in a mason jar with a bow on top for the holiday season. "I sold out in two weeks. That's how I found the 'business' in my business."

Lucas-Alcalay took it one step further to develop one of her most popular products.

"I realized people wanted shortcuts. I started experimenting with the herbs from my garden and combining

them with locally sourced salt to create seasoning salt to figure out how to make them taste good. People love that."

Lucas-Alcalay expressed gratitude for the Lafayette Chamber's recognition of her as the Business Person of the Year, and hopes that this will inspire community members to consider shopping locally.

Ben Canady is a repeat seasoning salt customer who stopped in the store to replenish his supply of rancho Moraga, flakey sea salt and lemon basil seasoning salts. "I love this," Canady says. "I think there should be more places like this."

Siv Ricketts has worked at Hollie's Homegrown since August 2022. "I love that Hollie's has local, organic, sustainable and mostly consumable products. The things that aren't consumable are beautiful. I love working here and interfacing with the community," Ricketts says. "It's so well deserved that Hollie is the Business Person of the Year, but she's doing good for the community. I tell people that what you buy here is supporting local people, but it's a gift you can feel good about because someone's creativity has gone into that product."

Hollie Lucas-Alcalay will be honored at a special dinner Feb. 1 at the Lafayette Park Hotel. The evening will include a State of the City address by incoming Lafayette Mayor Gina Dawson. For tickets or more information, visit lafayettechamber.org.

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[back](#)

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