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Moraga's Business and Nonprofit of the Year

By Vera Kochan



Children learn and play at The Child Day Schools-Moraga Photos Vera Kochan

With an overwhelming number of nominations to sift through (more than 80), Moraga Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Katie Bidstrup announced the town's 2024 Business of the Year -- The Child Day Schools-Moraga, and the Nonprofit of the Year -- Be the Star You Are!

The Child Day Schools-Moraga, located at 372 Park Street in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center, teaches children between toddler and TK age groups. Opened in 1989, by Executive Director/Founder R. Ann Whitehead, the Moraga location is just one among several in the East Bay, along with Lafayette, Pleasanton, and San Ramon.

The schools' mission is to provide "a humanistic organization dedicated to providing dynamic, age-appropriate programs for children while actively supporting teachers, families, and the community." They also boast low teacher-child ratios; carefully planned

classroom environments; well-trained, nurturing teachers; and programs that include art, music, movement, purposeful play, conflict resolution, and life skills.

TCDS-Moraga Director Emil Delgado-Olson has been with the school for 17 years. "I found out a day or two prior to the general announcement that we were the Business of the Year," he said. "I was taken aback by the number of nominations."

With five classrooms and a staff of approximately 18 employees, the school's steady rotation of an average 70 students call Moraga home, with a few coming in from Lafayette and Orinda.

What makes TCDS-Moraga stand out is their commitment to the surrounding businesses. "We like to participate and support the community by doing things with them," explained Delgado-Olson. "After COVID, it was nice to help the local businesses." That included having their students utilize next door neighbor California Academy of Performing Arts (CAPA) facility, ordering lunches from local eateries, or walking down the block to Moraga Post Acute to sing songs during the holidays or bring flowers to the patients.

Assistant Director Laura Arnold arranged for the students to participate in a food drive to benefit the Food Bank of Contra Costa/Solano. Last year's effort brought in 500 pounds of canned goods. A toy drive during the holidays collected over 600 toys that were distributed to battered women and children's shelters. Delgado-Olson said, "We want to make sure that the kids learn empathy by helping the world around them."

For more information about The Child Day Schools-Moraga visit: tcdschools.com or call (925) 376-5110.

Moraga's Nonprofit of the Year, Be the Star You Are!, is a 501(c)(3), and the brainchild of Lamorinda Weekly's own Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian. Her career credits extend to book author, producer, interior designer, radio host, and more.

While working with kids in 1995 as a casting director, Brian noticed that many of them had issues, especially with literacy. She was reading a lot of self-help books at the time and wanted to get the same message out to kids and women. By calling her charity Be the Star You Are!, she was planting a seed that "every person is unique. They have their own beauty and flame. We all have it -- we are enough."

Brian founded BTSYA! in 1999, along with her teen daughter, Heather Brittany, with the idea of empowering at-risk youth through literacy and positive media. "Had I had a crystal ball back in 1999 to foresee how challenging it would be to manage a nonprofit corporation solely with volunteers and donation dollars, I know I would not have taken the first step in creating Be the Star You Are!," she stated. "Thank goodness that I am not clairvoyant. I am a huge believer in being different, thinking outside the box, and valuing our individuality. My goal has been to provide encouragement, opportunity, and direction to women, families, and youth through increasing literacy, decreasing violence, providing positive media choices, and enhancing quality of life."

BTSYA!, is run by an all-volunteer staff that began by collecting and distributing books to nearly 70 organizations nationwide. It also produces positive-message radio programs that range from "education and advisement, to inspiration and guidance by covering every aspect of life, from abuse through money management, health, environmental stewardship, relationships, parenting, business skills, art, music, and entertainment." They support all ethnicities and have no religious or political agendas.

While Brian hosts one of the radio shows called, "StarStyle-Be the Star You Are!", the other one is hosted by teens. "Express Yourself" is intended to give youth a voice while teaching them to be confident, authentic reporters and writers. Both programs feature authors, artists, activists, musicians, and entrepreneurs that are making positive contributions to humanity.

"We've done so many outreach programs," stated Brian. "We even have teens tutor teens. There are so many opportunities to help people. I support the kids and listen to what they want to do. Their suggestions have been important to the programs. We're constantly evolving and changing to make it relevant to the times. We also have a teen book review program." She estimates having coached over 70 kids/reporters over the years, and they have gone on to jobs all across the country. BTSYA! is always ready to welcome more volunteers.

As an author, Brian is working on her eleventh book. Her first book, "Be the Star You Are!" was launched in 2001. Since then, she's written inspirational books that include teens' stories, gardening books, and picture books for children.

BTSYA! operates through contributions, in-kind donations, and proceeds from fund-raising events. They are not state or federally funded. For more information or to make a donation visit: bethestaryouare.org, or email: info@bethestaryouare.org.

The Moraga Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring a coffee/pastry reception to celebrate the honorees on April 13 between 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. at the Moraga Library's Community Room, 1500 St. Mary's Road. Please RSVP by visiting: Moragachamber.org.



Be the Star You Are! founder, Cynthia Brian, with some of her many books Photos Vera Kochan

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