

Published August 9th, 2017

Hacienda Nights: Food trucks a big success again this year

By *Sophie Braccini*



A recent Hacienda Nights event. Courtesy Moraga Parks & Recreation

Most cities that have food truck events sign a contract with a company that organizes it for them, such as Off The Grid or Taste of the World. No such company wanted to take the Moraga risk, however, so the Parks and Recreation staff decided to take it upon themselves and organized Hacienda Nights, Moraga's own food truck event. These happenings started last year and continue to be a big success this summer.

Staff members Clinton Calkins and Kimberly Nelson organized the trucks this year. Nelson says one reason why they decided to organize the nights themselves was because they wanted it to be on a Friday night, something that the truck companies do not typically do. She and Clinton look for trucks that are not in competition with Moraga's own restaurants, Nelson says.

One of the trucks, Baagan, which was at the first event on July 11, has strong ties with Moraga businesswoman Roos Pal, the owner of New Delhi Bistro (and formerly of Terzetto as well) who is friends with Baagan food truck owner Rajbir Randhawa. Pal describes herself as the

sales manager for Baagan. Randhawa promotes clean eating and a healthy lifestyle by offering vegan food that's gluten-free and organic. It is all plant-based, thus the name of Baagan that according to Pal is a Hindi word that means garden.

Moraga resident Ellen Beans tried the burger patty at that truck and reported how tasty it was. Pal recommends staying tuned for news about Baagan's creations, as some will be coming to the Rheem center's New Delhi Bistro in the fall.

The next food truck event on Aug. 11 will be at the Moraga Commons instead of at the Hacienda. Like other nights, it will all be organized by the small city staff - the director left a few weeks ago and has not yet been replaced.

Nelson is not sure what crowd size to expect on Aug. 11, since this is the week after the final swim meet and some families might be out of town. But staff wanted to test how the event would be received at the Moraga Commons, where it would have much more visibility. Nelson says that the trucks typically get about 600 patrons, with a high of 700 at the end of the season last year.

The parks and recreation coordinator explains that it may be a little less stressful for them at the Commons. When the trucks are at the Hacienda, she, Calkins and the town's janitor are in charge of cleanup that night to make the space pristine for the next day's wedding ceremony. She notes, however, that patrons have been very respectful of the place and that there is very little litter to pick up afterward.

On Aug. 11 the trucks will use part of the parking lot next to the park off St. Mary's Road. Patrons are encouraged to park on the street, in the skate park parking lot, or in the overflow lot on the Bruzzone property across the street. The trucks scheduled to be there are Yummi BBQ, Stuff My Waffle, Q-Craft, United Bites and izzyA's Frozen Custard. Nelson adds that some people follow that specific truck around and come to events just for its thick ice cream.

Hafiz Haidari, owner of Ristorante Amoroma in the Rheem center, says he has not noticed any negative impact from the food trucks on his business. The restaurateur indicated that business in general has declined, compared with last summer, but he blames it more on the traffic detour. He believes that the trucks attract a different clientele than the people dining at his place.

There will be two more opportunities to enjoy the trucks this summer after the Aug. 11 event at the Commons: on Aug. 25 and Sept. 8, back at the Hacienda.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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