

Long road back for many businesses wiped out by Lafayette fire

By Nick Marnell



Photo Nick Marnell

The Lafayette Circle businesses destroyed by the July 13 fire have regrouped with varying degrees of success as of the beginning of September.

Marta Chavalas of Skincare by Marta moved into the Lafayette Beauty Store and Salon on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, a temporary stop until she finds her new home. "It's been very difficult for me," she said, as her business requires water, sinks and special flooring. "No carpets," Chavalas said.

According to Jay Lifson, executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, Marion Iles moved her accounting business to Walnut Creek, as did Brad Backeberg. "The therapists have found new places and Kelly of Studio 102 Hair Design moved into a spot across from the Lafayette Library with two of her employees," Lifson said. Paul the Tutor landed a new location on Old Tunnel Road.

The owner of La Finestra restaurant said he is tantalizingly close to a new site for his business. "We are negotiating on a couple of properties in Lafayette," Jeff As-

sadi said. He initially checked out and rejected the Artisan Bistro location, because the building needed to come up to Americans with Disabilities Act standards and the landlord refused to help with any leasehold improvements.

"By the end of September, we definitely plan to reopen. We will be thrilled to serve Lafayette again," Assadi said. Insurance covered two months of wages for his employees, and Assadi said he expects all of his employees to return.

The Chamber of Commerce is close to securing a new permanent location as well, but Lifson said he could not yet comment on the targeted site, only that it was near the previous Lafayette Circle Chamber offices.

Sereta Churchill, Lafayette Community Foundation board member, said the foundation has sent information to each of the affected businesses so they can apply for community foundation grant funding.

(Note: Many of the business listed in the photo moved out of Lafayette Circle long before the July fire.)

Moraga moves toward regulating firearms storage

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Some also claimed that this regulation would abridge the second amendment to the constitution.

Proponents explained that existing laws are not specific enough. They stated that not all laws are easily enforceable, but they set the standards and goals of the community. Proponents also explained that in the 2013 case of Jackson v. the City and County of San Francisco, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that requiring safe storage of firearms was not unconstitutional. Such legislation has not been challenged in court since this ruling.

On the council, only member Kymberleigh Korpus made a detailed case against the safe storage of firearms ordinance. Although she said she was aware of the Jackson case ruling, she said that for her such an ordinance would be unconstitutional. She also argued that Moraga should not be addressing topics that are political national issues. Korpus added that government regulations were not the solution to all concerns, and that parents had other solutions, such as education of their children.

Mayor Teresa Onoda and council member Jeanette Fritzy both declared their support of both ordinances. Fritzy said that she did not believe this was a political topic,

and that the safety of the residents was part of the council's responsibility. She said she reviewed the data and was convinced of the efficiency of this rule. The mayor said that she occasionally goes shooting with her son and likes guns, but that she knows how teen parties can become unruly and if the town council can do something to prevent accidents, it should.

Council Member Dave Trotter proposed a compromise: drafting town rules regarding firearms storage, but not necessarily an ordinance. Vice Mayor Roger Wykle wavered between that option and asking for an ordinance before finally supporting the regulatory option.

The next step is now for staff to draft two ordinances: one that will restrict firearms dealerships in commercial districts, and one that will require firearms owners to safely store them.

There will be more opportunities for public input when the new rules are reviewed by the planning commission, before a final hearing at the town council level. At this time there are 61 territorial entities that have approved a specific zoning ordinance for firearms dealers in California and eight that require safe storage.

Rats and other rodents overrun Lamorinda

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A recent ABC news story stated that, "All across urban America, rats are scurrying in larger numbers and gnawing at the nerves of city dwellers ..."

Rats, while perhaps causing the worst headaches, are only part of the problem. Orinda's Dana Fouts reported that her father, Gary, wanted to emulate an incredible tulip display he saw during a trip to the Netherlands. "He planted approximately 200 bulbs in a painstaking arrangement. One tulip came up. The other 199 were apparently many meals to our evasive gophers and voles," she commented.

Deborah Bass, public affairs manager for Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control, said it does appear there are more rodents running around this year. There's no way to tell for sure, of course, because there's no way to monitor them. However, Bass reported, service calls regarding rats and mice from local residents are up 20 percent over last year. Mike Scott, co-owner of Honest Rodent Proofing, said his company, too, has seen a significant increase in the number of calls.

Everyone seems to have a theory as to why this is happening, with construction and weather the most likely culprits. Bass explained that whenever there are severe changes in the weather or construction disturbing their natural habitats, rodents search for new places to live, "wherever they can find food and harborage." Scott said he has repeatedly been asked this question and his employees discuss it all the time. "It's very difficult to pinpoint an exact reason," he stated. "I think it's a combination of reasons, a per-

fect storm." The years of drought caused the soil to crack and open up, "giving rodents an easy way to get in." And because Lamorinda soil is more clay-based, it's easier to penetrate. Then this year's abundant rain encouraged rampant breeding and forced rodents from their homes.

But Scott believes it goes even deeper than that. "Within the last several years, California has focused on integrated pest management, meaning using less poisons and toxins and more natural eradication," he reported. Although Scott agrees with that, he said, "it has allowed the rodent population to grow. ... It's an ongoing battle with no easy solution."

And therein lies a big part of the predicament. Currently, there is no way to safely eliminate these varmints. As Hyde stated so succinctly, "All you can do is manage the problem; you can't eliminate it."

But it can, indeed, be managed. To begin with, you can contact Vector Control, a free service throughout Contra Costa County. While its role is advisory (they don't set traps), their technicians will carefully survey your property, both inside and out, and advise you on what to do, how to do it and where to purchase whatever supplies are needed to hopefully get rid of the rodents living there. "Honestly, there is so much you can do yourself," Bass assured.

Even Scott, who eradicates rodents for a living, acknowledged that there are steps homeowners can take to reduce the chances that these small animals will get into their homes. "Rodents are looking

for a safe haven, someplace they can hide," Scott said. "There's no magic potion but it's all about cutting off their food source and preventing them from finding that safe haven."

Some suggestions from the professionals include:

- Keep firewood off the ground and at least 18 inches away from your house.
- Don't leave any pet food out and make sure there is no accessible water, food or birdseed (which, according to Bass, is "gourmet food for rats and mice").
- Pick up all fallen fruit (described by Bass as a rat's "buffet").
- Trim back tree branches and landscaping at least four feet from your roofline and cut back the ivy and juniper ("it's their idea of a Ritz Carlton").
- Make sure all vents leading under your house are in good, un-ripped, condition.
- Seal any holes around or leading into your house. Rats can squeeze through openings the size of a quarter and mice can get through a dime-sized hole.
- Set traps wherever you think rodents are traveling around your house, using peanut butter, nuts, bacon, pieces of apple or oatmeal as bait.
- Call a professional rodent control company; they will inspect, clean out and proof your house and set traps.

Whatever method Lamorindan's choose to use, Scott said the most important thing is "staying on top of it. Rodents are relentless so it's important to stay ahead of the game."



When I say "good,"
you say "neighbor."

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Building a Better Mouse (Rat) Trap

With rats in and around Paul Hyde's Orinda home, he realized he was facing a "battle I could never win. But I declared war." Discovering that birds were getting to the peanut butter-laced traps before the rodents could, Hyde placed the trap inside a shoe box, cut a hole on one end and placed an orange peel in hardened peanut butter. "We have rats that are so clever, they learned to lick the peanut butter from the trap without triggering it. They now have to yank the orange peel out to get to the peanut butter, thus setting off the trap." So far, Hyde said, it's working.

Dan Claytor, this reporter's husband, also vowed that the mice and rats would not win the fight around his Moraga home. Using an Amazon box, he cut a hole on each end and placed two oatmeal-filled traps inside. "That way, I get them coming and going," he explained. And he has, catching one most nights over the past month.



This contraption, contrived by Dan Claytor, traps rats as they dine.

Photos Diane Claytor