

## Theatre Square Presents: Parking Space Wars

By Sophie Braccini



Pati MacDonald, owner of Curves in Orinda Photo Sophie Braccini

**P**ati MacDonald is a fighter. The owner of Curves in Orinda's Theatre Square has been battling for her business and her customers for more than two years now. So when Douglas Parking LLC started renting parking spaces below Theatre Square to BART commuters and she saw the first and second floor of the parking garage filled with cars not belonging to customers, she started a petition to amend the rules.

Theatre Square, despite its central location and esthetic appeal, is a challenging place to do business. Only recently, Nino's Bay Restaurant, which was open for less than a year, had to close its doors. For Douglas Parking too, revenues do not seem to be enough

since they advertise rental of parking spaces to commuters. The idea of a covered parking space, for \$70 a month, only a ramp away from Bart is appealing.

"I have nothing against these people," says MacDonald, "but they are not customers here, they are not good for business at the Square, they shouldn't be allowed to use the premium first and second floor parking spaces." Patty got alarmed when her clients complained about the issue. They do not like to be forced to the depths of the third level when they come to exercise. In fact, they all signed her petition.

Even if they didn't respond to MacDonald directly, the management of Douglas Parking said

they took her letter seriously and decided to check the situation in the garage. All of the first floor is marked "Visitor Only," but according to the guard on duty this is to prevent Square employees from taking the prime parking spaces. All other users can stay there for as long as they want. There are only 18 spots on the first floor that have a time restriction posted, either 1 or 3 hours. David Douglas said he went to the garage himself and asked the guard that the 18 spots be controlled by chalk marking. "When I went again to check the situation a second time," says Douglas, "there were several open spots available in the time restricted area for Curves or other Theatre Square customers." He does not see the need for further restriction.

"We want parking to be as convenient as possible for people who shop here, exercise here and eat here," responds MacDonald. She acknowledges that there has been some improvement in the parking since the notices were posted but still complains that her clients too often have to park "in the bowels" of the parking structure. "It's good that BART riders can get covered parking here," she concludes, "but let's reserve the premium parking for those who are spending their money here."