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City and Chamber Celebrate 'Try Lafayette First'

By Sophie Braccini



Ben Mahoney (left) of Mountain Mike's Pizza hosted the party with Jay Lifson, Carol Federighi, Don Tatzin, Brandt Andersson and Dave Simpson Photo Sophie Braccini

"At the beginning of the year, we met with Chamber members and brainstormed what we wanted to achieve this year with 'Try Lafayette First'," says Simpson, "many ideas were floated around, but most frequently merchants asked that we improve our synergy with the city and local non-profits." Simpson believes that Lafayette businesses need to feel supported and acknowledged by the City. The first action in that direction was the 'walk-about-businesses' that took City Council members from business to business, with a Try Lafayette First ambassador, to meet local business people. "I personally took Mayor Carl Anduri to meet those business owners whom I knew had an old grudge with the City," remembers Simpson, "the dialogue was very genuine and led to action."

"Where would you prefer to live," asked Simpson during his short speech at the party, "in Carmel or Emeryville?" suggesting that the shopping experience makes a town and that it is the individual, locally-owned businesses that create that unique charm; they are the ones that give back to local schools and charities.

Simpson will be stepping down as committee chair to attend to his Big Blue Bookmobile; Lifson is currently recruiting a new volunteer.

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Sales tax revenue is up in Lafayette; for the last fiscal year, revenues increased 4.7% over the same period last year- a fact that could create a bit of revenue-envy in other cities. Some of this success can be credited to the awareness-raising efforts of the 'Try Lafayette First' campaign initiated three years ago by the Chamber of Commerce to educate residents about the economic benefits of shopping locally. Recently the City Council acknowledged the campaign's success and issued a Proclamation honoring the program.

On June 16 a festive celebration was organized at Mountain Mike's Pizza in Lafayette, where City officials, Chamber staff and merchants came together, congratulated each other, and renewed their energy and commitment to the economic vitality of Lafayette.

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jay Lifson and Dave Simpson, chair of the Try Lafayette First Committee, agree that one of the most effective ways the Chamber reached out to residents was the launch of the pledge campaign. "More than 1500 residents pledged that they would 'Try Lafayette First' when making a decision to shop for something, seek out a service or go to a restaurant," said Lifson, "I think that most people now get it, and understand that shopping local brings sales tax revenue that pays for road repairs, police and city services."