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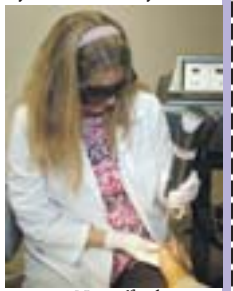
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When Buying Your Office Space Makes Sense

By Sophie Braccini



From left, standing: Caroline McCormick, Harvey Tilkin, Maria Aguayo, Licia Hofmann, Kerri Sayles, Stacey Salsedo, Robyn Hetland; kneeling: Stefanie Nightingale, Besy Bohulano
Photo Sophie Braccini

When Caroline McCormick stands on the 600-square-foot terrace of her new office, she enjoys unobstructed views of the hills of Moraga and large expanses of sky. She has plans to embellish it with plants, create a vegetable garden for her staff to share fresh food at lunchtime, and add a compost pile. What is nice about this vision is that she has all the time she wants to make it happen and she knows it will

be there to stay.

McCormick purchased the 1700-square-foot (plus terrace) suite 200 at 533 Moraga Rd. "Every morning, it's like going from home, to my second home," says a very satisfied McCormick, "and with the price of real estate going down, it does not cost more to buy a brand new custom space than it was to rent."

Her company, ACI, manages homeowner associations. "The

number of homeowner associations is growing," says McCormick, "they are a good deal for cities that don't want to have to maintain more roads. Homeowner associations maintain their own infrastructure and cities look favorably on developments that include this type of organization." McCormick boasts doubling the size of her company twice in the last six years. This growth explains why she had to move from her Lafayette of-

fice. "I was raised in Moraga and am now living with my family in Orinda," says McCormick, "coming back here was easy for me, and it is a lovely building."

She admits that it took some convincing for some of her employees who live in the East Bay. "But after a while, they realized that driving up the hill to Moraga was not worse than driving along Mount Diablo Boulevard," she said, "as long as they avoid the high school commute hours."

When she looked for a larger office space, she hoped to purchase rather than rent. "I was tired of wasting the rent money every month," she said. But business condos are not easy to come by, especially new, custom condos. "I had to put down 10% of the total amount and got an SBA loan with a 20-year term," says McCormick, "if the price of real estate had not come down I probably would not have been able to do it."

The deal included the complete customization of the interior space. "Allen Sayles (architect and co-developer of the building) designed our layout," said McCormick, "everyone has their own office, almost every one of them with natural light, and we have lunch together on the terrace every day."

ACI also got the contract to man-

age the building's business owner association. "This is my first commercial client," says McCormick, "we will apply the same strategic planning rules we do with our other clients." According to McCormick, every homeowner association has different sets of rules that are the constitution of the organization, but all have to budget and create a long term financial plan to sustain the property. "Our clients vary greatly in size, but they all have to abide by the same laws."

McCormick's only real worry at the moment is that if her company continues to grow and she has to make room for new employees, she will have to set her own office out on the terrace. "As long as it does not rain, it will be perfect," says an optimistic McCormick, "but I have another strategy: the office next to ours is leased, so I have the option to buy it when it becomes vacant; like that, ACI can continue to grow."

The property located at 533 Moraga Road was developed by Dan Minkoff and Architect J. Allen Sayles as a business condominium with eight suites – three suites are still available.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

business briefs

Mathnesium

3435 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Lafayette, 283-4200,
<http://www.mathnasium.com/lafayetteca>

The Mathnesium method is true to the life research of math teacher and writer Larry Martinek who developed, over 20 years, a method of teaching math that combines oral, visual, mental and written modalities to help children develop Number Sense, a grasp of mathematical fundamentals. More than 200 Mathnesium centers have flourished in the United States and Ara Chakrabarti recently opened a center in Lafayette. Mathnesium claims to teach kids math the way that makes sense to them. In Lafayette, Mathnesium's Power Math Workout program is for students in grades 1-12 and is available year round. Students' time is spent working on foundational skills as well as one on one tutoring with their school math work. The program is drop in, no appointment required. Chakrabarti is an Engineering Graduate from the University of Michigan. His professional career encompasses developing mathematical and geometric modeling software to managing Information Technology organization for large global corporations.

A Makeover for Chef Chao

343 Rheem Boulevard, Moraga, 376-1740



Chef Chao, the Chinese restaurant next to 24-HourFitness in Moraga, celebrated its 30th anniversary last year and just got

a brand new look. Chef Chao and his son, Henry Chao, continue to prepare and serve the food that has made this restaurant a Moraga staple.

Smart Cookie Learning

3182 Old Tunnel Road Lafayette, Phone: 297-5304

Smart Cookie Learning is a new academic tutoring center in Lafayette that offers, according to its owners, a "non cookie cutter" approach to academics. The center offers one-on-one or semi-private tutoring for subject mastery, or small, interactive and collaborative classes. Smart Cookie Learning offers personalized programs in Math, Writing, Study Skills, and SAT/ACT Test Prep. The team is formed of Maggie Jacobberger, Alycia McAlister, and Donovan Messier. Jacobberger was born and raised in Lafayette. She graduated from Harvard College after receiving a public school education in Lafayette. She has been tutoring and mentoring students in Lamorinda for over 16 years. McAlister holds degrees in Teaching, Psychology, and Child Development and has taught students and teachers at Stanley Middle School in Lafayette and Monterra Middle School in Oakland. After leaving the classroom proper, she was both a Director of Education and a Center Director for Sylvan Learning Center in San Ramon and Walnut Creek. Donovan Messier began tutoring students as a freshman at Saint Mary's College and has been teaching math to students for over 12 years.

Memory Screening

Senior Helpers of Moraga is sponsoring the Alzheimer's Foundation of America's 9th Annual National Memory Screening Day on November 15 at Aegis. "We are sponsoring this free, confidential memory screening that afternoon as a community service," says Senior Helpers' Director Kevin Reneau. The screening will take place at Aegis in Moraga, 950 Country Club Drive, on Tuesday November 15, 1:30-4:00 p.m. The five to ten minute test will provide seniors or their families some indication of one's memory and whether one should have a follow-up evaluation by a family doctor or neurologist. Call 376-8000 for more information.

Innovative Real Estate Agent Posts Videos To 'Sell' Lafayette

Lafayette real estate agent Dana Green conceived of, and had professionally videotaped, a series of five videos focusing on why people love to live in Lafayette and presenting different neighborhoods. "Each of Lafayette's many neighborhoods has its own personality," says Green, "The best way to begin to learn Lafayette is to start by dividing the community into four quadrants that can be easily identified by our four Lafayette elementary schools." The short movies (about 2 minutes) are very well done, concisely edited and featuring lively narration by Green. The films are posted on Youtube and can be accessed on Green's new web site: <http://dana-greenteam.com/neighborhoods>.

News from the Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

Tonight! Monthly Mixer at Mosaic Financial Partners, Wednesday, November 9, Mosaic Financial Partners at 3620 Happy Valley Rd., Suite 100, 5:30pm.

Local Business Marketing & Low Cost Video in a Youtube World Workshop - Wednesday, November 16, 8:00am at the Lafayette Library & Learning Center. Free for Lafayette Chamber members, \$15 for non-Lafayette Chamber members. Limited seating, RSVP at workshops@lafayettechamber.org.

Orinda

Chamber ribbon-cutting event at the Christian Science Reading Room & Bookstore on Wednesday November 16th, 3:00pm at 24 Orinda Way (next to the library). The Christian Science Reading Room & Bookstore, recently relocated from next to Morrison Jewelers to the Christian Science Church just down from Orinda City Hall offices.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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