

Published July 18th, 2012

Back to the Table

By Sophie Braccini



Instructor Liza Scaff works in the kitchen with Leslie Pease and Lisa Evaristo (right) Photo Sophie Braccini

When they put their business plan together, the plan was to combine the cooking school with an upstairs kitchen for the Lafayette School District. "I worked with the Burton Valley lunch program for years," says Evaristo. "At first, our project was to provide the Lafayette School District with a place to cook all of the lunches."

"But it ended up not being big enough," adds Pease, "so we changed orientation and decided to make the upstairs a production kitchen."

The upper floor can accommodate four cooks working at the same time. It is outfitted with all of the professional equipment required in a facility that produces large quantities, and it is fully up to code with the Sanitary District. "The requirements are very stringent," says Pease. "It took us a year to complete the whole space." Large cold rooms are available for clients to store their ingredients. "The cost is \$20 to \$30 an hour and people can work here 24 hours a day, seven days a week," says Pease.

The feel of the downstairs is completely different. Although the ovens are professional grade, everything has a homey feel. The island is obviously larger than what would be found in an average home, but the style and the colors make everything inviting. "When the class starts, people will sit around the big wood table and meet one another," says Evaristo, "then they'll move around the island where each will have a spot to start working." In the end, the participants will gather around the table and share their meal together.

A diverse collection of classes are available. Some include entire menus, such as An Evening in Tuscany or the Barbecue Menu; some are about techniques, like the pie class, preserves and canning or basic culinary skills; others cater to the younger crowd like Cooking it Up in College; Dim Sum and Sushi are a few examples of cooking from around the world; and a class like Cooking for the Whole Family helps plan healthy menus that will appeal to the young and old. "We will also have Sunday classes that will start at the Farmers Market," adds Evaristo, "to open people up to what's available and what can be done."

On the website, the calendar is full of classes offered through the end of the September. While not sold out yet, some are already "almost full," like the baby food class. "We were lucky to have great cooks and chefs contact us to teach in our new school," says Pease. The biography of some of the teachers is quite impressive: some are chefs and have owned restaurants; all have extensive teaching experience and share a passion for food with Evaristo and Pease.

It's a real family business. Pease and Evaristo's mother comes by to check on her daughters' new business, and sometimes Evaristo's younger daughter comes to help.

For more information, visit backtothetablecookingschool.com.

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

It's a sweet deal, two local sisters going back to the kitchen together and inviting the community along. Leslie Pease and Lisa Evaristo have just started "Back to the Table" in Lafayette. A new business that offers culinary classes of all types and for all ages on the first floor, while upstairs a production kitchen that can be rented by local business owners who sell their food products - and all that in downtown Lafayette, in a quaint little cottage on Lafayette Circle, next to Queen Bee.

"The idea came to us during a trip to Italy where we took a cooking class as a family," remembers Evaristo. "That's where the concept came together for us. The class started at the market where we bought what was available and fresh that day, then choosing recipes and putting the whole dinner together, while learning useful techniques along the way. We had never experienced a class that was applicable to everyday life, uncomplicated yet making great food," adds her older sister.

The two women, standing in their newly opened business, finish each other's sentences. They are on the same wave-length, animated by the same energy and desire to bring something unique to the community.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA