

Rustic Tavern Soon to Open in Lafayette

By Sophie Braccini



Chris Amsden and Tressa and Gary Rust at the new Rustic Tavern bar.

Photo Sophie Braccini

Before chef Gary Rust and his wife Tressa got married, they worked together with friend Chris Amsden at Lark Creek in Walnut Creek. After the couple's brief stint in San Diego and the welcoming of two children, the Rusts' friendship with Amsden was still going strong. Now the three have decided to build a restaurant of their own together, Rustic Tavern, which opens May 1 at 3576 Mount Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette.

Gilbert Sonet is a veteran of the local food scene and he knows what it takes to make a restaurant a success. "All the people I find space for have been very successful," says the commercial real estate broker and restaurant consultant. "Lafayette is the best place to open a restaurant when you've mastered your art and have a good commercial sense. For Rustic Tavern, the place to be is Lafayette, with its educated residents and eclectic food scene."

The Rusts and Amsden took the plunge, the restaurant occupying the former Roy's Garlic Garden location. And they're doing it all on their own: investing their own money; utilizing contractors from their family to remodel; and lending a hand themselves for finishes. "We wanted a look that will be authentic and relaxed," says Tressa Rust who will be directing the front part of the restaurant, "and we are adding an outside patio with plenty of flowers to take

advantage of the large sidewalk."

Of course what makes or breaks a restaurant is the quality of the cooking, and Rust has no worries about her husband's ability. After all, she says that before she fell in love with the chef, she fell in love with his cooking – and many others did, too. "I remember when we were working together for the first time at Lark Creek," she says, "my customers were coming back asking for his Fish of the Day. I started to realize that he had followers who were coming back just for him."

The chef cooks fish so well because he was a fisherman many years ago; Rust tired of the very hard life at sea and chose the much easier (wink, wink) life in the kitchen. "I must always have had that love of food in me," he says, "from the time of my grandfather's vegetable garden and the dishes that came from his harvests."

Rustic Tavern will have a Fish of the Day on the menu, but that's only the beginning. Rust and Amsden are being very particular in their choice of farmers for the best meats, vegetables and fruits – an easy task due to their experience – and they are choos-

ing fishermen and fishing practices that produce wonderful fish with minimal impact on the environment, since some species can be overfished. Rust is planning a creative menu that will change with the seasons.

"My cooking has a European flair," he says. "It is not super high-end, but it will be very pleasing for people who like to eat quality, organic and delicious food."

Amsden will preside over the bar, mixing cocktails and entertaining guests. He will also keep an eye on the eclectic drink list that includes beverages from all over the world including a gluten-free beer.

The three friends are very excited about their project and so are the Rust children. "My 6-year-old daughter loves to come in and play hostess," says the proud mom. "She says, 'Welcome to Rustic Tavern, would you like to be seated by the window?' and she and her brother are our official dessert testers."

They, too, are looking forward to May 1.

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

New Name, New Beast Car, Same Great Service



From left, the gentlemen who built and will drive the modified 1964 Ford Galaxie: Eric Dove, Buzz Weldy, Joe Thompson, Rene Aguirre and Chirs McCoy.



Krysten Laine and Rene Aguirre decided to change the name of their beloved Urban Suburban to The Mechanic located at 3328 Mt. Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette because they work on more than just SUVs; they wanted their new name to reflect their broad focus on foreign and domestic

cars, restoration and fabrication work. To showcase their talents they are also launching the Triple Nickel Resto Race Fab team, and debuted their creation - a muscular modification of a 1964 Ford Galaxie, now an "off-road Baja beast" – at a recent "south of the border" themed party, prior to taking

off for their first off-road race, the Baja 1000 – an adrenaline-filled, dusty, challenging adventure around the Baja peninsula that is not for the faint of heart. Owners, builders and racers were on hand at the party to answer questions about their year-long Baja project. C. Tyson

business briefs

Storyteller Named Small Business of the Year
3506-E Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette, (925) 284-3480



Inside the new store

Photo Sophie Braccini

Lafayette's iconic children's book store, The Storyteller, was recently chosen as the Small Business of the Year by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. "For many of us, being able to walk into a bookstore with our children, and getting lost in the magical world of children's stories is something that is still cherished," said Chamber Executive Director Jay Lifson. "Not only is The Storyteller a top notch store with great selections for children and young adults, they employ the friendliest knowledgeable sales staff around." The store experience includes puppet shows, story telling and gift wrapping. Linda Higham, a former local school teacher, has owned her bookstore for over 20 years. About her secret to success, she says, "My employees are educators and librarians who are dedicated to children's literature, and the surrounding community is loyal to our store." The store just moved from Lafayette Circle to the Shops at Plaza Center, just behind Peet's and Whole Foods. Higham will be honored at the 13th Annual Contra Costa Council Small Business Awards Luncheon Friday, May 10 at the Hilton Concord. For information, contact Linda Carlson at (925) 284-7404 or linda@lafayettechamber.org.

Moraga Employee of the Month



Connie Kuhlmann

Photo provided

Connie Kuhlmann, a Moraga Royale assistant director who has dedicated her work life to helping seniors, has been named the March Moraga Employee of the Month. As assistant director at the local assisted living facility, Kuhlman oversees the care and well-being of its 94 residents. During her eight years on the job, Kuhlman has found a special place in the hearts of Moraga Royale seniors, due to her unwavering dedication to making their lives better. "Connie always finds time to address the concerns of all those involved in making Moraga Royale a fun, supportive and truly caring home for our elderly," said Dianne Wilson, Moraga Royale executive director. In winning the award, Kuhlman received a \$50 gift card to Safeway as well as a \$50 gift certificate to CVS Pharmacy from the award sponsors, the Rotary Club of Moraga and the Chamber of Commerce.

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Honors Two Associates
5 Moraga Way, Orinda, (925) 253-4600



Susan Schlicher



Andi Peterson

Coldwell Banker in Orinda recently honored two of its leading sales associates: Susan Schlicher and Andi Peterson Brown. Schlicher earned membership into the company's International President's Circle, a prestigious honor bestowed upon the top Coldwell Banker sales associates worldwide and Brown earned membership in the company's International Diamond Society. "Membership in this elite group is achieved by the most talented and knowledgeable real estate professionals in the industry," said Rick Turley, president of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage. Brown is an Orinda native who joined Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in 2009. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Magna Cum Laude from UCLA and was a member of the 2008 USC Lusk School of Real Estate's Ross Fellowship program. Schlicher has been associated with Coldwell Banker for seven years and has consistently been in the Top 100 sales associates for Coldwell Banker, having also obtained the "President's Circle" Award and the "Elite" award for 2011. She and her husband have lived in Lafayette for 37 years, where they raised their family, and she has been involved in many community organizations.

Two Local Nursing Homes Get Five-Star Rating:

Rheem Valley Convalescent Hospital & Rehabilitation
Grace Healthcare of Moraga
348 Rheem Blvd., Moraga, (925) 376-5995
Orinda Rehabilitation and Convalescent Hospital
11 Altarin Rd., Orinda, (925) 254-6500

In a recent ranking of nursing homes by U.S. News & World Report, Grace Healthcare of Moraga and Orinda Rehabilitation and Convalescent Hospital of Orinda received five-star ratings for performance in health inspections, nurse staffing, and measures of medical quality of care.

New Branch Manager Announced at Prudential
8 Camino Encinas, #100, Orinda, (925) 244-1933

Pete Sabine, a longtime real estate professional, has been named branch manager and director of company-wide business development at the Prudential California Realty Orinda office. In addition to overseeing sales professionals and managing day-to-day operations, he will be involved in teaching, training and coaching the company's agents to success. Sabine began his real estate career in 1985 in Orinda and his family heritage goes back three generations in the Lamorinda area. For more information on the Prudential California Realty in Orinda, please visit www.pruca.com.

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

News from the three Chambers of Commerce
Lafayette

Partnering with GiftCards.com, the chamber is launching a program to drive more traffic to Lafayette Chamber of Commerce merchants with a Lafayette-branded community gift card that can be purchased online at www.lafayettechamber.org, www.GiftCards.com, or at individual business/merchant websites. The annual cost of the community gift card is \$59. Chamber members can also create their own branded gift card for \$199 a year in addition to the community card. To sign up for this program, please contact GiftCards.com representative Ken Seagle at ken.seagle@giftcards.com. Enrollment ends May 10.

Coffee with Mayor Mike Anderson from 8 to 9 a.m. April 26 at the chamber office. Join Anderson for a conversation about Lafayette's hot topics including the new medians on Mt. Diablo Boulevard on the east end of town and the potential ban on plastic bags.

Save the date for Lafayette's 11th Annual Taste of Lafayette from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, May 21 beginning at Lafayette Plaza. Go to LafayetteChamber.org to see the fun video from last year and reserve your tickets.

Moraga

The 7th Annual Moraga Community Faire will be held May 11 in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center. The core of this community gathering is its businesses, coming out to meet and greet the public. Other attractions will include a classic car show, wine tasting from local vineyards, cool music from school bands on the stage, and oodles of activities for the kids (crafts, bounce houses, contests, etc.) Registration is open until May 1 to all Moraga Chamber of Commerce members and to Moraga-based businesses. If you have questions about your eligibility, contact Ellen Beans at ellen.beans@gmail.com.

Orinda

Susan Martin was elected vice president and Roy Hodgkinson was elected director to the 12-member chamber board of directors. Martin has a healthy history on the chamber board, has demonstrated leadership and reason, and knows how to set an example of rolling up her sleeves to get the work done. Hodgkinson, an Orinda resident since 1995 with his wife, Barbara, had a 40-year career in information technology including service with Mutual Life of Canada, Bank of America, Kaiser Permanente, NetApp, and with several startups in various technical, management and consulting roles. Among Hodgkinson's strengths are project management, interpersonal and partner communications, team building, strategic and contingency planning. Since retiring in August 2012 he has worked hard on his golf game and explored opportunities to contribute as a volunteer and leader in not-for-profit organizations.