

Business

Intuitive Writing Project Empowers Young Women

By Sophie Braccini



Elizabeth Perlman at her new location in Orinda's Theatre Square

Photo Sophie Braccini

The first thing you see when entering the new Intuitive Writing Project location in Orinda's Theatre Square is a wall filled with pictures of women who have made a mark in history. The message above the picture mosaic is clear: "Heroines write their own story."

The Intuitive Writing Project is a place for girls to be empowered as they find their own voice. The program and its curriculum are the creation of Elizabeth Perlman, who draws on her training and experiences as a writer and art director. She has passionately developed a 12-week module to empower teen girls. The newly opened location in Theatre Square is the manifestation of her dream.

"Arts enable us to understand ourselves, develop as people, and find our answers," Perlman says. Pulling on the work of Professor James Pennebaker (University of Texas), Perlman explains that the most effective expressive art form is writing because the human brain is wired to look for and receive stories. "When we are able to take our experiences and write them down, we form a narrative, and when we have that narrative, the mind is able to understand and let go of things," she says.

During her teens and formative years, Perlman experienced pressure to conform to her surroundings. It took her years to discover who she really was, to find her unique strengths

and to value herself. "I wanted to extract what had been the most helpful to me in my 20 years of self-development and build a 12-week program creating a way for young women to access their own wisdom, find their own answers and realize their own worth," she says.

Perlman set up her program as a nonprofit. "I believe that she chose (to become a nonprofit) because her heart is in the service of those girls," says Maureen Brown, treasurer of Intuitive Writing Project. Brown who is the mother of an eighth grader at Orinda Intermediate School has experienced how the Amherst Artists and Writers method that Perlman uses with the girls can transform someone. As a mother, Brown is aware of the pressures the girls are under and how important a program like this is for them.

The first module focuses on accessing the right part of the brain and intuition. "There is something unique about the female brain," says Perlman, citing work by neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, "because we have more bridges between the right and left hemispheres." Puberty is the time when self-esteem goes down, Perlman says, and this is the best time to remind girls of their inner wisdom/intuition, and that trusting it gives them power.

Veronika Pister, a sophomore at Miramonte High School, says that Perlman has showed her how to tap

into the right side of her brain. "School is so left side intensive," says Pister, who loves mathematics and has now learned to be in touch with her emotions. "It is such a challenge in high school to figure out who you are and what you stand for. Putting it into words gives it strength." She reports being happier and more balanced since she started the program six months ago. She has also developed a close bond with the four other girls in her group (six is a maximum for Perlman). "My writing has also improved incomparably," she says. She attributes it to the weekly practice and the confidence built through the positive reinforcement of the Amherst method.

The students also have a module on media literacy, and another about body image. They learn about non-violent communication, "a more direct, but from-the-heart way to speak your truth and get what you want," says Perlman. The girls work on building healthy relationships as well.

Perlman also works one-on-one with students, helping them list their strengths and passions. "Life's work is where your strengths and passions overlap," she says. "The first part of the work is to realize your value, then to recognize that you are part of something bigger."

At the end of the program, the girls do a visual self-portrait and put together a book of their writings that

they can draw from in the future, possibly for their college essays.

Pister says that she will continue to work with Perlman as long as she can. There is a continuing writing program for the girls who have graduated. Pister plans to intern for Perlman in the future.

"Now I can find beauty in everything," she says.

For more information about the program, visit intuitivewritingproject.org.

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

Moraga Produce Changes Ownership and Adds New Choices
576 Center Street, Moraga, (925) 377-1000



Shelly and Dennis shop in the new Moraga Produce Photo Sophie Braccini

Changes are happening at Moraga Produce, which opened in 2012 in the Rheem Shopping Center, next to CVS. "We are adding new grocery products, more variety, more organics," says Christy Soronz, the daughter of the family that now owns the store. The Soronzes live in Berkeley and Moraga Produce is their first grocery store. They have plans to open another store next summer. "We immediately liked this produce center and thought it had great potential," says Soronz. Shelly and Dennis, two Moraga residents and regular customers of the store said they immediately noticed that there were changes in the air when the market was bought. "As long as the prices stay good, we are very happy to see new groceries, meats, nuts and dairy," they say. Soronz adds that if people would like them to have some of their favorite items available, they should just ask for it. "We want to tailor our offerings to what people here want," she adds.

Whole Foods Grant

Whole Foods started accepting applications Feb. 17 for its Small Producer Grant. Last year, Moraga-based Hollie's Homegrown, an herb business, won the competition for the Lafayette Whole Foods location and received 5 percent of a day's sales from that store, which she used to purchase a greenhouse. The deadline for the application is March 4. The application is open to producers of food, body care, makeup, supplements and lifestyle products (books, toys, fitness equipment, etc.). Products must be made and sold in the region to qualify. For specific information, visit smallproducergrant.com.

Aegis of Moraga Celebrates 16th Anniversary

950 Country Club Drive, Moraga, aegisofmoraga.com

Aegis of Moraga will celebrate its 16th anniversary in style and with local flare at its Art and Wine Celebration from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 26. The event includes wine tasting by Captain Vineyards, music by Lafayette Gold Coast Chamber Players, artwork by Lamorinda artists, chocolates from Powell's Candies and Aegis' executive chef's selections of fruit and cheeses. Aegis Living is an assisted living and memory care community.

Moraga Employee of the Month



From left: Kevin Reneau, Jessica McCormick and Dianne Wilson Photo provided

The Moraga Employee of the Month for January is Jessica McCormick, the assistant director of the Moraga Royale retirement community. McCormick began working at Moraga Royale as a part-time receptionist in 2010 and rapidly worked her way up through many different roles at the facility, including office manager, activity director and director of marketing before assuming her current position. "Jessica excels at every job she undertakes and does them with enthusiasm and perfection," said Moraga Royale Executive Director Dianne Wilson. "She has the innate ability of letting our residents know they are valued and important." McCormick will receive gift cards to Safeway and Chef Chao in Moraga at an upcoming Moraga Rotary luncheon.

News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

Monthly mixer begins at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 25 at Indigo & Poppy, 1009 Oak Hill Road.

Young Professionals Group 'Meatup' at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 25 at La Finestra Ristorante, 100 Lafayette Cir #101, Lafayette. RSVP at www.Meetup.com. Must be under 40 for this gathering.

Nominations for the Lafayette 2014 Green Awards can be submitted until Feb. 28. Complete the nomination form on the city's website at lovelafayette.org/GreenAwards if you know a resident, student, teacher, local business, community organization, or architect/builder that took impressive steps to become more environmentally friendly and sustainable in 2014.

Orinda

Save the date for Live at the Orinda 2015 Comedy Night at 8 p.m. Friday, March 6 with Jimmie "JJ" Walker, Jeff Applebaum and Master of Ceremonies Anthony Hill. Advanced tickets available on the chamber website at www.orindachamber.org.

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

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