

Thanks to our sponsors,
the 2015
Lafayette Earth Day Festival
was a huge success!



RUBENS PARTNERS LLP
Certified Public Accountants



We hope to see you
at the Festival next year.

sustainable lafayette

Business

Lafayette's Rancho Cantina Brings Diners Back to Culinary Roots

By A.K. Carroll



Photos A.K. Carroll

Before Moraga became home to Saint Mary's College or Orinda built Theatre Square, before the completion of the Caldecott Tunnel or the creation of Lafayette Community Park, the wild west of Lamorinda was divided into ranchos – tracts of land used to raise cattle, sheep and horses. Ranchos were places of arduous work and generous hospitality – and are the inspiration for the entrees and ambiance of Rancho Cantina, Lafayette's most recent dining destination.

Rancho Cantina takes Lamorindans back to the culinary roots of the region, blending the traditions, culture and recipes of Spanish conquistadors and Mexican rancheros, the original Californios, for an eating experience that is truly "auténtico." Before you make it through the swinging wood gates or under the branding iron archway, you'll be greeted with a smile of hearty hospitality, if not from a staff member, then by one of the owners themselves.

Julie Mitchell and Erik Peterson have been mapping out the cantina for over two years. When early plans for a French restaurant fell

through, they shifted their focus to something historically local. Mitchell herself is a seventh generation Californian, with a father and brother who both ranch cattle and another brother who farms, supplying many of the ingredients used in the cantina's dishes. They hired a seasoned consultant and veteran head designer, pulling in Jaliscan executive chef Jorge Hernandez (formerly of Left Bank) and veteran servers from Lake Chalet and other local restaurants, striving for quality at every corner.

"What we're doing isn't earth-shattering," said Peterson, "but it is new. What is Rancho? It's a culture, a heritage, a cuisine. This place is an homage to the rancheros and their contribution to California."

With its reclaimed Salinas Valley barn wood, leather-backed bar stools, Mexican tiling and big open windows, the upscale saloon is cozy, but polished – as suitable for date night as it is for a family meal. An open kitchen and visible wood-fired grill connect creator and consumer, eliminating traditional dining as tortillas flip before your eyes. Ample outdoor seating

(and the promise of future heat lamps) invites you to come in for a drink and linger into the evening.

An old rancho saying, "It is better to arrive at the right time than it is to be invited," suggests that all are welcome to the Rancho table. This is reflected in the restaurant's long benches, spacious bar, and community-style seating, as well as its menu, which offers more small plates than it does entrees. On the whole, the selection is blissfully simple, with just over a dozen options ranging from Tostones de Papas Fritas, mashed and fried potato medallions with a tender interior encased in a crisp coating and served with fire-roasted salsa, to the Guisado de Carne y Nopal, a traditional rancho stew of tender slow-braised pork, soft strips of cactus, chunks of potato and California peppers, served with corn tortillas. It's one of Peterson's favorites.

The kitchen is still experimenting, offering a velvety fresh guacamole, garlic-herbed mission olives, fire-roasted and verde salsas, and a house-made hot sauce potent with habaños. More familiar Mexican offerings, like the chicken enchiladas, sit side-by-side with crispy California fish tacos, beer-battered and fried, served with cabbage slaw and the same spicy aioli that brightens Rancho's grilled shrimp. Adobe Brick Chicken marinated in herbs and served with crunchy fennel slaw and a Meyer lemon crema provides food enough to share, though you might want it all for yourself. Entrees come with traditional rancho pink beans and rice, staple sides to flesh out a meal. The menu also offers \$5 options for "niños" and vegetarian alternatives, including a grilled asparagus salad and grilled portobello and poblano quesadillas.

In true Cantina style, the restaurant features a full bar (heavy on tequila) and a drink menu that includes local beers, imported bottles, a modest selection of wines and rancho-inspired



cocktails, such as the Rancho Sour, made with Lunazul blanco tequila, house-made jalapeño syrup, fresh lime and pineapple juice, Herbsaint liqueur and an egg white and The Spicy Banderero, made with Xicaru Mezcal, fresh lime, cilantro, jalapeño and agave.

Rancho Cantina celebrates the "golden days" of the rancho period – a time of fiestas and music, land wealth, laughter and leisure. Pull up a chair and have a seat at the table.

Rancho Cantina

3616 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette
(925) 282-3811
www.ranchocantina.com



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

Gypsea Bungalow: A Unique Boutique in Downtown Lafayette

3413-B Mt Diablo Blvd., Lafayette
(925) 310-4201 gypseabungalow.com



From left, Pam Lewerenz and Danya Stehr glow on the opening day of their new store, Gypsea Bungalow. Photo Sophie Braccini

On Gypsea Bungalow's opening day May 1, the charming store and private outside patio were already busy with curious shoppers, and a line formed quickly at the counter where Danya Stehr and Pam Lewerenz, the two business partners, were working the cash register, delighted and surprised by this early rush. The two ladies have been friends for some 25 years. They met in San Francisco when they were still dating the men who later became their husbands. One lives in Orinda, the other in Lafayette, where they are raising their families, both with children in their teens. "Ten years ago we started a custom cupcake business together," says Stehr, "so we knew we worked well together." This time, the two are realizing a long-time dream: having a store that's like the charming boutique you discover on vacation that makes you want to buy everything inside. "Everything that's in here are things we love, that we've found elsewhere and could not find

here, or have discovered while traveling," says Lewerenz. The choice of gifts for self or loved ones is wide, from tabletop items, to accessories for the home, a limited but charming collection of women's and men's clothing, as well as jewelry and an assortment of new and upcoming brands. The store is located off the street, behind ResCare HomeCare and has available parking. "We are a destination boutique," explains Stehr, adding that the two of them looked for a long time before finding the perfect location. The private shaded patio is available for parties and a few are already scheduled.

Moraga Employee of the Month for April



From left: Kevin Reneau, Marty McInturf and Jay Ingram
Photo provided

Marty McInturf, who has worked tirelessly as Moraga's town clerk for the past six years, has been named the April Moraga Employee of the Month. McInturf is the primary liaison between the town government and the public, recording all activities and decisions of the Town Council. She has produced over 120 town

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

newsletters during her tenure, keeping the citizens of Moraga well informed on the latest information. "Marty is an extremely dedicated employee, often is not only the last person in the office to leave, but takes work home with her," said Jay Ingram, Moraga's director of parks and recreation. The Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce will award McInturf with gift cards to Safeway and to Ristorante Amaroma in Moraga at an upcoming luncheon in May.

News from the three Chambers of Commerce Lafayette

The 13th annual Taste of Lafayette will be from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, May 19. Tickets for the classic event that tours diners around town to sample food and drinks at favorite and new restaurants are available online at lafayettechamber.org.

Ribbon cutting for the Hideout Kitchen and Cafe at 5 p.m. Thursday, May 14 at 3406 Mt. Diablo Blvd. (behind the Soccer Post).

Ribbon Cutting for Behymer & Steel Chiropractic at 5 p.m. Thursday May 21, 1043 Stuart Ave. #10

May mixer from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 27 at Lafayette Physical Therapy, 3468 Mt. Diablo Blvd. suite B110.

Moraga

Moraga Community Faire and Classic Car Show from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 9 at the Rheem Shopping Center (see story page B1)

Orinda

The Orinda Restaurant Tour: Dining Al Fresco is scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, May 12 throughout and about Theatre Square in downtown Orinda with most of the Orinda restaurants providing samples of some of their finest offerings to tour participants. Music by The Rippers will accompany the diners along their easy walk. Pie and coffee service from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Tickets for the event are available at orindachamber.org.