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## Four Female Business Owners Work Together to Energize Brown Avenue

By Sophie Braccini



Brown Avenue business owners, from left: Eliza Jamkochian, Robin Nicole, Graciela Guerrero-Reynoso and Kalpana Gurung  
Photo Sophie Braccini

As downtown Lafayette expands east and west along Mt. Diablo Boulevard, side streets that had trouble attracting foot traffic are starting to see an influx of potential customers, and new and existing businesses are taking advantage of it. Four women are part of the blooming on Brown, their positive energy igniting a stretch that was more known for its shortcut from Deerhill Road to Mt. Diablo Boulevard than for its vibrant retail establishments.

The latest arrival on the Brown business scene is young businesswoman Robin Nicole. An Acalanes and UCLA graduate, Nicole studied fine arts with the objective of becoming a makeup artist. "I've always liked the makeup industry, and enhancing looks naturally," she says, "and I wanted to figure out a way to do it as a small business." Nicole worked through college with renowned makeup artist and businesswoman Trish McAvoy, then worked for two years at Gina's Skin Care on Stuart Street in Lafayette. She got her esthetician license while working, learned how to run a small business

and took over the little space when the owner retired. She recently moved Robin Nicole Beauty Bar to 1027 Brown Ave., a much larger space to expand her business into a one-stop beauty shop.

"What I love is brow design and eyes, and to show women practical techniques to enhance their look in a natural way," explains Nicole, who goes a step further with her own brand of cosmetics. "I have my own skincare and makeup line, mostly mineral based," she says. She works with a private label company, choosing the perfect combinations from its stock. "Things are always changing in the makeup industry, and I educate myself to evolve my products," she adds.

In her beauty bar, she is partnering with two hair specialists, one of them longtime associate Allyson Gardner. She is also bringing in someone to do natural nails, and someone to do facials.

What Nicole did not know when she was about to move onto Brown was that just across the street was another former Acalanes student, Eliza Jamkochian. "My mother knew her and told me about her business, Glamorous Boutique, selling these adorable dresses," says Nicole. Jamkochian was happy to welcome Nicole onto Brown, and the two ladies immediately hit it off. "I love this little neighborhood and I work a lot with Liz (Jamkochian)," adds Nicole.

In her salon, a rack of on-sale items from Glamorous Boutique are on display, and at 1048 Brown, Jamkochian says she recommends Nicole's salon to her clients. When she opened her cocktail and special occasion dress boutique two and a half years ago, Jamkochian already had some synergy going with her father's business next door, Creative Alterations. The family of Armenian origin has been in the garment industry for four generations. Jamkochian reached out to Lafayette Fashionista owner Graciela Guerrero-Reynoso, who owns the upscale women's consignment store at 1020 Brown to be part of the collective cross-promotional effort.

Guerrero-Reynoso, who bought Rosie's Upscale Consignments two years ago, feels good promoting other businesses on Brown, and she displays their business cards on her counter. She reached out to one of Brown's latest newcomers, Kalpana Gurung, who moved Kalpana Threading from 3370 Mt. Diablo Blvd. to 1020 Brown after the building where she was located was slated for

demolition.

Together, the four businesswomen are planning future events on Brown. "We are planning a holiday wine walk in November," says Jamkochian.

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