

Business

Four Female Business Owners Work Together to Energize Brown Avenue

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

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 business-

women are planning future events on Brown. "We are planning a holiday wine walk in November," says Jamkochian.

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

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business briefs

ECOlunchbox Uses Kickstarter to Fund New Line

In 2008 Sandra Ann Harris, a Lafayette mom, developed a 100-percent machine washable lunch bag with matching napkins as an alternative to the vinyl, plastic and other less-environmental options used by children and adults. She is now launching a Kickstarter campaign to expand the ECOLunchbox product range with an innovative new line of lunch containers to that are water-tight and don't use plastic. The purpose of the funding is to bring to market the Blue Water Bento collection, an innovative new line of lunch containers that combine no-leak silicone lids with non-toxic stainless steel bottoms. Since 2008, Harris says that ECOLunchbox has sold more than a quarter million lunchboxes and averted the use and disposal of tens of millions of pieces of plastic trash. Harris hopes to raise \$30,000 from the Kickstarter campaign by Aug. 30 and as of Aug. 7 she has already raised 67 percent of that amount. To check it out, go to www.kickstarter.com and search ECOLunchbox (one word), or go to www.ecolunchbox.com.



Photo provided

News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

Save the date for the 20th annual Lafayette Art, Wine and Music Festival, Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 19 and 20 in downtown Lafayette. "This little sidewalk sale has grown to be an award-winning Art, Wine and Music Festival with four stages, 21 live bands, 260-plus Artists, KidZone, great food – and arguably the largest selection of wine, beer and ale of any San Francisco Bay Area festival," says Chamber Executive Director Jay Lifson. The festival will be held on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For information, visit www.lafayettefestival.com.

The Entrepreneur Club Changes Format

After 10 years and nearly 1,000 participants the Entrepreneur Club program is being retooled. The goal has been to create a place where business owners and managers can share ideas and solve problems that are specific to their business. Connections and alliances were made creating an ongoing learning community. Since the Club started, experts were invited to speak on dozens of topics including Public Speaking Skills, Social Media, Closing Sales, the Laws of Attraction, Working on your Elevator Speech, Digital Marketing, Human Resources, Your On Line Presence and even Yoga. Michelle Billings and Mark Shaw helped fuel this group since it began. "There are now many new programs available in the morning like GO RAMP UP that our members are participating in," explained Chamber Executive Director Jay Lifson. "July marked the final Thursday morning meeting. Beginning after the holidays, we will be shifting to a 'once a quarter' evening format that will combine a networking opportunity with great speakers." People already on the Lafayette Chamber EClub list will receive an invitation to join. If interested, contact the chamber at Lafayettechamber.org.

Moraga

The Fourth Annual Golf and Tennis Tournament will take place on Monday, Sept. 21 at the Moraga Country Club. For golfers, the cost is \$175 per player, with play beginning at noon, and for tennis players, the cost is \$75 per player, with play beginning at 1 p.m. For golf and tennis registrants, dinner, refreshments and prizes are included. Dinner only (non players) is also available for \$40 per person, beginning at 4:30 p.m. Registration forms are available at the chamber website, and persons wanting more information may call Kathe Nelson at (925) 323-6524 or e-mail her at kathe@moragachamber.org.

Orinda

California Independent Film Festival Mixer at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 18 at Barbacoa, #145 Theatre Square. There will be margaritas and a presentation of some of the films, documentaries and shorts that will be shown at the film festival in Orinda, Moraga and San Francisco Sept. 10-16.

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

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