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Moraga Chamber announces 2022 Business and Nonprofit of the Year

By Vera Kochan



2022 Business of the Year, Bay Area Ballplayers (from left) instructor Caleb Van Blake, owner Steve Hammond, instructors Annie Cimperman and Craig Broadman Photos Vera Kochan

The Moraga Chamber of Commerce has named Bay Area Ballplayers as the town's Business of the Year, along with Joy In Motion as the Nonprofit of the Year.

The success of owner Steve Hammond's Bay Area Ballplayers, located at 1460 Moraga Road, Suite H, began in January 2019, when he took over the space formerly occupied by a Hallmark card store. He chose to open his business, which initially focused on baseball, in Moraga so that people didn't have to drive long distances to get the type of services and training that he offered, and while coaching in the Moraga and Orinda area, his vision came true. His goal was to instill in the next generation the tools and skills that would help them reach their potential.

those services to include a 70,000 square-foot outdoor sports and recreational facility consisting of sports training camps, baseball and lacrosse training, adult fitness classes, birthday parties, a 22,500 square-foot artificial turf field, batting cages, portable baseball backstop, lacrosse goals, and portable medicine ball wall.

When COVID-19 mandates limited public use of his indoor facility, Hammond was granted a permit followed by additional extensions to run a temporary outdoor facility located on a vacant lot of the property at 1325 Moraga Way behind Safeway. He has currently expanded

Hammond's reaction to the Business of the Year honor was one of surprise. "I'm excited that we get to be able to highlight our business," he said. "We built the turf field during COVID, and we've been able to find programs to fit the community. The outdoor parties and camps are a natural fit, and it's grown since then. The field has gotten great use, and people have been so supportive."

Hammond's wife, Belle (owner of Moraga Bootcamp) helps run some of the fitness classes, thus helping to keep BABPs a family business. "We support a bunch of youth sports programs in the community and collaborate with them, too," stated Hammond. "And, not just baseball. There's soccer, water polo, lacrosse, basketball and volleyball. I just want to run a good business that supports the community." For more information visit: www.bayareaballplayers.com or phone (925) 247-5164.

Nonprofit of the Year recipient Joy In Motion owners Linda Craig and Justin Cole, located at 1545 School St., were thrilled to receive the honor. "It was in the midst of opening our fall registration," stated Cole, "and it was such a pleasant surprise. We were very excited to get the word, because it was hard during the pandemic."

The idea of opening a nonprofit dance studio struck the two colleagues and friends back in 2014. "Most community theatres and dance studios are a service to the community," explained Craig. "That's how we approach dance." They were determined to hire a teaching staff as employees with access to sick days, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation and other basic benefits. They were also keen to run a nonprofit company that was managed with transparency, responsibility and in service of the community. To that end, in 2015, Joy in Motion began with seven board of directors "with the expectation that the leaders would bring with them valuable experience in nonprofit organization and business."

It wasn't easy finding a perfect name for their venture. They did an internet search to see what other dance studios called themselves and found one named Joy of Motion. However, they mistakenly kept referring to it as Joy In Motion. Realizing their mistake, they decided to stick with it. The reason the word "joy" in their logo is not capitalized is because Cole was always called "Little j" (for Justin) growing up, so the nickname just stuck.

In 2016, at a prior Moraga location, their first week of instruction consisted of 16 boys and 39 adults in a hip hop class. It wasn't long before Joy In Motion counted over 200 students under their wing as they expanded their offerings to include tap, jazz, ballet, and contemporary dance.

The IRS approved their 501(c)3 application for nonprofit status in 2017, and nearly a year later they moved into their current location which was the former post office in Moraga Center. After knocking down some walls and adding colorful, yet neutral paint schemes, Joy In Motion can now claim over 500 students under their tutelage.

Like most businesses, the dance studio suffered during COVID. In order to offer a form of relief to a mandate-stricken society, Joy In Motion began to give Livestream, pro bono, dance classes over social media sites that were viewed by people nationwide. They even had participants logging in from Germany. "People thought it was great for mental health during COVID," said Cole. As pandemic restrictions evolved, the studio held classes outdoors and had their most profitable summer in 2021, "because there was nothing else to do."

Joy In Motion is an all-accepting studio that welcomes students of all ages, genders, body-types and special needs. They've grown to offer adult Pilates and yoga; and give dance recitals that include students as young as 3 years old through adulthood.

Joy In Motion has already received honors beyond Moraga. In 2019 and 2021, they were included in Best of East Bay for Diablo Magazine's "Best Kids' Classes" category. They also earned runner-up status in that category during 2020 and 2022; and runner-up for "Best Dance Studio and Kids' Parties" in 2022. They also won a 2022 Best of Moraga Award for "Best Dance School".

With a five-year anniversary in their current location coming up in 2023, Craig and Cole are planning a community fundraiser party with food and beverages, a silent auction and more. For additional information visit: www.joymotiondance.org or call (925) 388-0668.



2022 Nonprofit of the Year, Joy In Motion (from left) owners Linda Craig and Justin Cole Photos Vera Kochan

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