



Once Upon a Time at Fairyland

By C.J. Hirschfield



Photo by Maria Rodriguez

Oakland restaurateurs Mark Drazek (Sidebar), Guy Karmi and Kanitha Matoury (Spice Monkey) and Amir Iranpour (Bacheeso's) believe it's good business to give back to the community.

Hospitality begins at home

This article originally was published in the Oakland Business Review.

To paraphrase Congressional titan Tip O'Neill: All hospitality is local.

That adage holds true even for restaurants, hotels and attractions that depend heavily on out-of-town guests. Those establishments still need the support of locals who don't just patronize them, but also recommend them to their friends, relatives and colleagues.

And when local hospitality businesses partner in unique and creative ways – especially when they use the reach of effective social media – everyone wins.

Nonprofit Children's Fairyland is pleased to partner with local establishments that believe, as we do, that creating community is just good business. We take our 63-year-old brand very seriously, and we have learned that joining forces with businesses that appreciate affiliation with an Oakland treasure – especially if we offer valuable exposure in return – is good business.

Local businesses know that when they partner with Fairyland, they also gain a direct route to our 7,500 Facebook fans, our 2,000 Twitter followers, the near-

ly 10,000 people who receive our e-newsletter, and the over 20,000 unique visitors to our website each month. Those aren't merely numbers, by the way: we're talking about parents, grandparents and kids who love Fairyland and want to support other organizations that support us.

Let me share a few of my favorite examples.

Bacheeso's is a restaurant directly across the street from Fairyland. Their healthy Mediterranean fare is a hit with our staff, and owner Amir Iranpour has reciprocated by offering us several creative partnerships.

For example, Fairyland family members can show their cards and get a free buffet lunch for their kids. Amir also donates food to our park's Gala event; in return, we advertise that Bacheeso's is the designated "after-party" location for our two largest events. He appreciates the shout-outs we post to our ardent Facebook fans, and he insists that one of our recent postings boosted his business.

Amir also donates his leftover food to homeless people, saying that giving back to the community benefits him as a person and as a business owner. That's why his restaurant greets you with a poem on the wall written 800 years ago

by the Persian poet Saedi. The translation: "Doing small things for other people will help the entire population."

Spice Monkey Restaurant & Bar downtown is best known for its eclectic global fusion cuisine. Its owners represent a global fusion, too – Kanitha Matoury is from Cambodia and Guy Karmi is from Israel. In addition to donating food to Fairyland's Gala, they also have a "Day of Giving" each Thanksgiving, when they offer three-course dinners to anyone donating 13 cans to the Alameda County Community Food Bank. Last year they served 300 dinners and donated 1,350 pounds of food to the Bank.

Every month Spice Monkey hosts a game night; it also has hosted a graduation luncheon for a nonprofit group and has donated gift certificates to worthy organizations. "We've created a warm, bustling, location where people can come and eat good food and be part of a community that is friendly and diverse as the city as in which it is located," says Kanitha.

And how's this for a creative partnership? Hip local eatery Sidebar on Grand Avenue is now offering "The Fairyland," a cocktail made of Cachaça, lime, pineapple syrup and rosemary. Co-owner Mark Drazek is donating a dollar from every cocktail sale to our park, and has also offered a gift certificate for our Gala's auction. Let's just say that our Facebook and Twitter fans loved seeing a photo of the cocktail, and Mark loved the exposure for Sidebar.

Mark doesn't advertise – "too expensive," he says – but he strongly believes that the work he does for local causes close to home is not lost on the neighbors on whose business he heavily depends.

The owners of all three of these excellent establishments agree that while out-of-towners' visits are nice, local support is critical to their success. And, they say, community partnerships can't be viewed in strictly traditional business terms. They also say that supporting community causes is good for staff morale.

As Kanitha so elegantly puts it, "Good karma is good marketing."

C.J. Hirschfield is Executive Director of Children's Fairyland, which is located next to Lake Merritt at 699 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland. For more information call 452-2259 or e-mail cj@fairyland.org.