

La Borgata at Serrano

A Bustling Tuscan Village in the Heart of El Dorado Hills

By Lynn Machon • Photos by Connie Cody Photography

WHEN DEVELOPERS FIRST introduced the idea of a large-scale shopping plaza at the intersection of El Dorado Hills Boulevard and Serrano Parkway, there was concern from community planners that the center wouldn't quite fit in with the existing master plan for Serrano.

But "fit in" is exactly what La Borgata at Serrano has done. Nearly seven years later, the Tuscan village-inspired center stands as a rustic and elegant corner piece of upscale retail, dining and executive office space. In fact, the five richly-hued buildings set around a cobblestone piazza and village fountain are home to many of El Dorado Hills' signature establishments.

Currently, La Borgata at Serrano houses nearly 20 different tenants, including the higher profile merchants Bank of America, Masque Ristorante, Le Petit Chateau, The Spa of La Borgata, Sky Sushi and Sartory Coffee. Throughout the upper level, gorgeously-appointed executive suites reveal an assortment of professionals, such as orthodontists, financial planners and title companies.

Owned by Shankar La Borgata, LLC, the center is operated by the Eugene Burger Management Company (EBMC) which handles property management and leasing

functions. Carol Cunha, who assists EBMC with property management, says the owner and management company are both committed to continuing the success of La Borgata. "EBMC has worked very hard with the new owner of the center to develop positive relationships with our tenants," she says.

In that true spirit of community, management teamed with merchants in late April to host an extravagant Spring Celebration event to showcase La Borgata merchants and celebrate the re-launch of Serrano Magazine. "The owner came out of pocket for over half of the cost of the event and is very dedicated to making the center a gathering place for Serrano residents," says Cunha. She notes several of the center's tenants also were instrumental in making the event possible through planning assistance and donations of food, products and entertainment. As the close-knit center welcomes the summer, we talked to several resident business owners about their companies, the recent gala and what it is like to work in La Borgata.

Masque Ristorante

Guests at La Borgata's Spring Celebration were treated to exquisite cuisine graciously provided by one of Northern California's premiere Italian eateries. Crab and lobster

cakes, chilled shrimp skewers and assorted domestic cheeses and salami were just some of the tasty offerings from Masque, complemented by wines donated for the event by local independent wineries.

Celebrating its fourth anniversary last month, Masque Ristorante is an El Dorado Hills culinary masterpiece that has been recognized nationally as one of the best restaurants in Northern California, if not the country.

With the recent additions of Executive Chef Ezio Gamba and General Manager Daniel Shinaut, Masque continues its tradition of consistently providing a spectacularly unique menu along with an impressive wine list highlighting many local wineries.

During the week, La Borgata merchants and customers are fortunate to be able to enjoy the Masque Café for quick breakfasts of coffee and pastries, or lunches featuring seasonal salads and daily specials. The main restaurant's elegant private rooms and rustic patios are ideal for special parties or company events. And on weekends, Masque now serves a delectable Sunday brunch, the perfect complement for a weekend shopping and spa excursion.

According to Event Coordinator Amy Sanford, the summer months feature exciting new dining and entertainment events

Preceding page, clockwise from top left: Janet Scherr and Celeste Schleimer of Serrano magazine; Debbie Nelson-Moell of Le Petit Chateau (left) with costumed dancers; a lunch performed at Sartory Coffee; Helen Baumann, El Dorado County Supervisor (left) with Michele Moore of Concours Promotions and Gail Gebhardt of Redwagtail Films; Frances Cropp, Lisa Borrier, Jennifer White, Sunny McCall; Renaissance-style dancers entertained in the marketplace.



at Masque, such as monthly outdoor wine pairing dinners and the Concours Raduno series. With the festive bar and welcoming patio, Masque will again be this summer's preferred destination for live music, laughter and libations.

The Spa at La Borgata

One of the landmark tenants of La Borgata is undoubtedly the Spa at La Borgata. When owner Tatia Davenport first opened her venture in January 2004, she started with just six employees and a vision. Today, it is a world class destination spa drawing clientele from all around the region.

True to the Spa's goal to provide a place for customers to relax, renew and recharge, the extravagant full service spa and salon pamper guests from the moment they walk in. In addition to offering complete hair treatment and nail care, spa services include a host of decadent facials, massages and specialty treatments such as the Lemon Grass & Green Tea Body Treatment and the Café Mocha Body Polish. The relaxing "quiet room", refreshing Jacuzzi and exfoliating spa shower amenities complete the day spa's luxurious experience for guests, whether there for an hour or a day.

Davenport was a key player in orchestrating the Spring Celebration at La Borgata. Not only did her team provide massages to guests, she lined up several unique vendors

to help make the event a rousing success.

A driven entrepreneur, Davenport recently added to her successful portfolio by launching spa partnerships with local California Fitness Centers. While those spa ventures will surely flourish under her care, the Spa at La Borgata will likely always remain her baby.

Solare Tanning Resort

New owner Mike Downs is proud to call La Borgata home to his unique Tuscan-themed tanning salon. Boasting a calming and peaceful interior, "Our salon is designed to feel more like a spa than a tanning production line," he says.

Ten private rooms provide customers with a relaxed atmosphere and varying levels of tanning options, including Mystic Tans and Airbrush Tanning by appointment. A true family-run business, Downs' two daughters are closely involved – Danielle is part-owner and manages the salon, and Heather helps with day to day operations.

In addition to high-end tanning beds, Solare offers stylish jewelry and a nutritional product line. The salon's ideal location, between Sky Sushi and Sartory Coffee provides a steady stream of customers. Downs says organized events like the Spring Celebration are a great way to encourage more traffic for neighboring merchants by promoting the center to the surrounding community.

Smiles by Hastings

When Dr. James Hastings, DDS, moved his practice from Sacramento to La Borgata in April 2005, he was attracted by the upscale and user-friendly nature of the complex.

In the last three years at his location above The Spa at La Borgata, he has focused his intimate practice on personal attention. "Customer service is what we're about," says Dr. Hastings. "I like to see one patient at a time and be able to interact with them on a personal level. I want to build long-term personal relationships each one."

While Hastings handles general dentistry, his specialty lies in cosmetic or aesthetic procedures such as reconstructive dentistry, bite balancing and bonding. He is one of less than 300 credentialled cosmetic dentists in the nation. Dr. Hastings often teams with periodontists and other specialists to complete life-changing transformations which, as witnessed in before and after photos of his patients, are nothing short of amazing.

Another team Dr. Hastings is glad to be on is the one at La Borgata. "The management is very good and responsive, and the complex is well-run," Hastings says. As Hastings looks to grow his practice, he sees well-attended community events like the April party as a great way to increase awareness of his office and the good work he does.



Le Petit Chateau

When owners Debbie Nelson-Mottell and her husband, Mark Mottell, opened the upscale European home furnishings store in La Borgata in November 2003, they created a stunning centerpiece for the Tuscan shopping center.

Just walking into the store is a luxurious experience in and of itself. The massive ceilings and rustic European feel give way to a breath-taking collection of old world furniture and accessories, gorgeous floral arrangements and vignettes of charm at every turn.

Mottell says the majority of her business comes from repeat customers. "We have tremendous clients, whom we absolutely love," she says. In fact, Mottell says, many have truly become friends. In describing her customers, she says "They are typically well-traveled, sophisticated, creative, warm individuals who enjoy a special and unique shopping environment."

An active and involved tenant, Mottell helped organize and coordinate April's gala event and found it a wonderful way to showcase the charm of La Borgata to the community.

"The atmosphere in the La Borgata Center is truly a one-of-a-kind shopping experience," says Debbie. "The Tuscan village environment is beautiful and truly special. Our clients enjoy the casual yet upscale, unique and friendly environment."

The Whitney Group

C. Townley Larzelere, president of The Whitney Group, became one of La Borgata's first executive tenants when he opened his office door in January 2004.

His decision to relocate from Gold River was based on several different factors, but most prominently, convenience. "The traffic congestion on Highway 50 during commute hours was becoming unbearable," says Larzelere, who lives in El Dorado Hills. These days, his office at La Borgata is just a mile and a half from his home and is near Serrano and Parker Development, one of The Whitney Group's biggest clients for the past several years.

Even though his company specializes in what tends to be behind-the-scenes support services, Larzelere says the high-profile nature and the location of the La Borgata center is a great for business. "The convenience of having Masque Ristorante located next door with such delicious food is perfect for entertaining clients," he says.

Larzelere (who goes by his middle name, Townley) and his wife, Tari, attended the Spring Celebration event with both friends and clients. He says they had a "very enjoyable time" and looks forward to more events like it in the future.

Strategy First Mortgage

Another behind-the-scenes tenant is Strategy First Mortgage, a certified mortgage

planning firm owned and managed by Serrano residents, John and Rena Williams.

In April, the Williams celebrated their one-year anniversary at La Borgata and currently have seven employees, with four in the office on a regular basis.

Like many other executive tenants, convenience was a major factor in their choice of office locations and he notes that the majority of their strategy sessions with clients take place onsite at La Borgata.

"We often meet with clients or friends at one of the wonderful patio settings for lunch or dinner," says John. "We enjoy the quaintness of the center, the restaurants and the shops." He sees the environment as very comfortable and conducive for doing business in the Serrano community.

The Williams loved the idea of La Borgata's spring party and thought it was a great way to support local businesses.

"This was such a high energy spot," John laughs. "We enjoyed the people, and everyone seemed to be enjoying the warm spring evening, great music, food and wine."

True to its Tuscan township design, La Borgata's Spring Celebration in April provided a gathering spot for merchants and the community to enjoy casual socialization and entertainment. An estimated 500 people enjoyed Renaissance-style dancers, music, food and wine throughout the evening. 🍷