

Love fulfills dream of hometown clinic



Brad Harper
THE NEW MGM

Dr. Porcia Love picked up her 18-month-old daughter, Caroline, who wore a matching lab coat emblazoned with the logo of her mom’s new business. Friends and colleagues smiled and cheered.

Love looked around and fought back emotion as she tried to describe how it felt to open her own clinic in her hometown of Montgomery. “It’s a dream come true,” she said. “I know it sounds like a cliché, but it’s not every day that you get to come home and open your own practice.”

River Region Dermatology & Laser celebrated Tuesday after opening the 4,000-square-foot clinic at 2060 Berryhill Road in Eastchase. It offers a wide range of services, from eczema treatments, to skin cancer surgeries, to chemical peels, phototherapy. There’s a spa offering facials, waxing and more, and selling skin care products.

Nine people work there at the moment.

Love has spent the last few years

working at another practice in Montgomery but decided to go solo when she launched her own clinic. “It’s a risk that you take when you do that, and I wanted to take the risk on my own,” she said.

She settled on the Eastchase spot because it’s a growing area with a lack of dermatologists. Of course, there are other benefits for the new mother, who just had a second child.

“I live like five minutes away,” she said.

The clinic is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to noon on Friday. You can see more at RRDermatologyLaser.com.

Local Carrabba’s one of 43 closed

The *Montgomery Advertiser* first reported Feb. 16 that Montgomery’s only Carrabba’s Italian Grill had served its last meal.

That location at 1510 East Blvd. was one of 43 restaurants across the country closed by parent company Bloomin’ Brands, which also owns Outback Steakhouse and Bonefish Grill. The company announced the closures during a sobering earnings report that showed fewer people ate at its restaurants last year than in 2015.

The nationwide numbers showed that traffic at Carrabba’s was down 2.7



BRAD HARPER / ADVERTISER
Dr. Porcia Love holds her one-year-old daughter, Caroline, at a ribbon-cutting event for Love’s new River Region Dermatology & Laser clinic in east Montgomery.

percent last year, while Bonefish Grill’s traffic fell 3.7 percent and Outback Steakhouse’s traffic dropped 5.7 percent.

“Although 2016 was a challenging year for both Bloomin’ Brands and the industry, we made real progress on our strategy to reallocate spending away from discounting toward investments to strengthen brand health,” CEO Liz Smith said. “We are pleased with how our brands are performing so far in 2017, particularly at Outback where we

believe our investments are beginning to gain traction.”

Bloomin’ Brands spokeswoman Elizabeth Watts said the decision to close Carrabba’s in Montgomery was “based solely on business circumstances” and wasn’t a reflection on employees or their service.

The location had 52 employees. Watts said some would be able to transfer to open positions and a sister restaurant and all would receive a severance.

Hampstead launches expansion

East Montgomery’s Hampstead development has started construction on a major expansion that will include home construction on 46 new residential lots.

The new homes will include Hampstead’s first wooded estate lot, which will be the community’s largest residential property to date. That’s scheduled to be finished by the end of February.

The rollout will also include the unveiling of the new Lido Pool, which will be the largest neighborhood pool in the Montgomery area. It’s scheduled to open in March.

In all, the expansion is expected to take about a year.

Winning wines at \$10 and under

- San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition — Best of Class and Double Gold winners \$10 and under:
- Sauvignon blanc:** 2015 Bogle, \$10; 2015 Darkhorse, \$9.99 — both double gold.
- Chardonnay:** McMannis Family Vineyards 2015, \$10; 2015 ForestVille, \$6.99 — both best of class.
- Pinot Gris:** 2015 Trinity Oaks, \$9 — best of class.
- White blend:** 2015 Menage a Trois, \$10 — best of class.
- Pinot Noir:** 2015 Three Thieves, \$7.99 and 2014 Bubo, \$8.99 — both best of class; Smoking Loon, \$8.99 — double gold.
- Zinfandel:** Sutter Home NV, \$6.
- Merlot:** Round Hill 2014, \$9; Coast 2014, \$9; Backhouse 2015, \$10 — all double gold.
- Cabernet Sauvignon:** 2015 Silver Creek, \$9.99 — best of class; California Dream 2015, \$5.98 and Sutter Home NV, \$6; and Trader Moon 2015, \$5.99 — all double gold.
- Red Dessert Wine:** Barefoot Sangria NV, \$6.99, and Merritt Estate (N.Y.) Bella Rosa NV — both double gold.

I’ll drink to that

The best wines under \$10



Rhonda Abrams
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

Here’s a dilemma most wine drinkers face: You want to buy a good bottle of wine, but you don’t want to spend a fortune.

And, if you’re like me, you’d like to help support a fellow small business owner, choosing a pleasurable wine from a small winery at an affordable price. How do you figure out which one to buy from all those on your local liquor store’s shelves?

The judges of the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition have suggestions to solve our dilemma. Since it claims to be the largest competition for American wines, with 63 judges spending more than four days rating over 7,000 entries from 28 states, and with one of the only wine competitions with categories specifically for lower- and moderately-priced wines, it can reasonably be stated that they have named the “best wines in America” under \$10.

Since its humble beginning in 1983 as the Cloverdale (California) Citrus Fair Wine Competition, the competition has grown in prestige. Winning can be a major boost for a small winery, increasing both sales and their reputation.

“Winning puts me on the map. It gives me credibility,” said Peter Tonti, whose Tonti Family Wines 2013 Old Vine Zinfandel Artisan Series won the Red Sweepstakes award.

Tonti Family Wines is a small business, producing only 500 cases a year. Since winning, they’ve been getting orders from Florida to Canada. “I’m new in the business, and I’m 77 years old. I don’t know how hard I want to work, but there’s already been increased demand,” Tonti said.

This was truly a delicious Zinfandel as was their slightly less-expensive Old Vine Zinfandel Reserve. Priced at \$60 and \$50 respectively, they were at the higher end, price-wise, of most wines competing.

The over-

whelming number of wines in the competition were priced considerably lower. Judges rated wines at a wide range of price points by varietal, primarily at prices most of us look for. So they’ve done a lot of the homework in finding the “best” wines under \$10 or \$20 or \$30.

The Public Tasting of the Competition, held Feb. 18 in San Francisco, featured more than 300 wineries, so I could not only try the winners but discover some other terrific options. I particularly enjoyed the wines from a small winery in Sonoma, California, called Lucinda and Millie (lucindaandmillie.com). Both their Chardonnay (\$15) and Cabernet (\$16) were organic, appealing, and nicely balanced. And I’ll definitely be looking to buy the slightly citrusy Sauvignon Blanc (\$14) from the small Steelhead Vineyards.

Typically, in most wine competitions, judges look for an overall winner regardless of price. But that tends to favor expensive wines. The very best cabernet sauvignon, for example, is likely to come from a winery that grows or buys expensive grapes, ages wine in first-use French oak barrels, and cellars it for years before release. That all costs money, making it virtually impossible for a less expensive, but still enjoyable, cab to compete.

It also means the winning, lower priced-point wines are likely to come from large wine-making companies who own large tracts of their own vineyards. Many of the winning \$10 and under wines, for example, came from Trinchero, including wines from Trinity Oaks (Pinot Gris \$9.00), Menage a Trois (white blend \$10 and Rose \$10), Sutter Home (Zinfandel \$6), and Three Thieves (Pinot Noir \$7.99). ForestVille, named “Best in Class” in the Chardonnay \$9.99 and under category, is made by Bronco Wines (who also make Charles Shaw “Two Buck Chuck” among many other brands).

It means these very affordable wines are likely to be consistent, year-after-year, and widely available. You’ll probably find many at your supermarket, local liquor store on the wine list of your local casual dining restaurant.

But not all good, affordable wines have to be from big wine companies. The white Sweepstakes winner, Hanna Sauvignon Blanc 2016 (\$20.99) was made by a small family-owned winery. By sheer coincidence, the day after I attended the Public Tasting of the Chronicle Wine competition, I was at a friend’s home for lunch, and my friend — who knew nothing of the competition — served that wine, which paired nicely with the chicken curry and endive salad. It was a lovely Sunday afternoon wine.

You can find the complete list of all San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition winners by category here: <http://winejudging.com/medal-winners>.

Rhonda Abrams is the author of 19 books including “Entrepreneurship: A Real-World Approach,” just released in its second edition. Connect with her on Facebook and Twitter: @RhondaAbrams. Register for her free business tips newsletter at PlanningShop.com.