

# Locally owned more than just a catch phrase

By **KATHARINE BALL**  
The Salinas Californian

You won't get careless, anonymous service at south Monterey County businesses.

While south county residents may complain about the lack of large chain stores in their communities, plenty of their fellow residents are filling the shopping gap with their own small enterprises.



**Katharine Ball**

They're serving up food at restaurants, preparing taxes, selling auto parts, offering locksmith and engraving services, purveying gifts or collectables, styling hair and operating corner markets.

All of them say the personal touch is key to their success — and so is community involvement.

Many of south county's storekeepers say they know their regulars by name, likes and needs.

They might get in special items just for one customer, or prepare a special dish at a restaurant.

"My clients, I consider them my friends," says Kasey Hurley, owner of Pets and Such in King City.

Or take Mario Diaz, a co-owner of The Grill in King City. Diaz says he tries to accommodate his clients' tastes by preparing them meals they request that are not on the menu. If someone isn't satisfied, he says, they don't have to pay.

That's the kind of individual attention and desire to please that shoppers are unlikely to find at big-box retailers or chain restaurants in larger cities.

Consider the generosity of many of these business people as well.

Most of them are not getting rich off their enterprises, but they're often the first to be

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*Pets and Such in King City*

asked for contributions if a sports team needs funds or a community event needs services or provisions. And, frequently, they pony up.

You'll find the floral contributions of Tiffany Anthony at many scholarship fundraisers and raffles.

"It's good advertising and helps out the organizations we donate things for," says Anthony, owner of Precious Petals Flowers and Gifts in King City.

Some business owners also say it's a duty to offer jobs to south county youths.

In the process, they sometimes develop a next-generation entrepreneur.

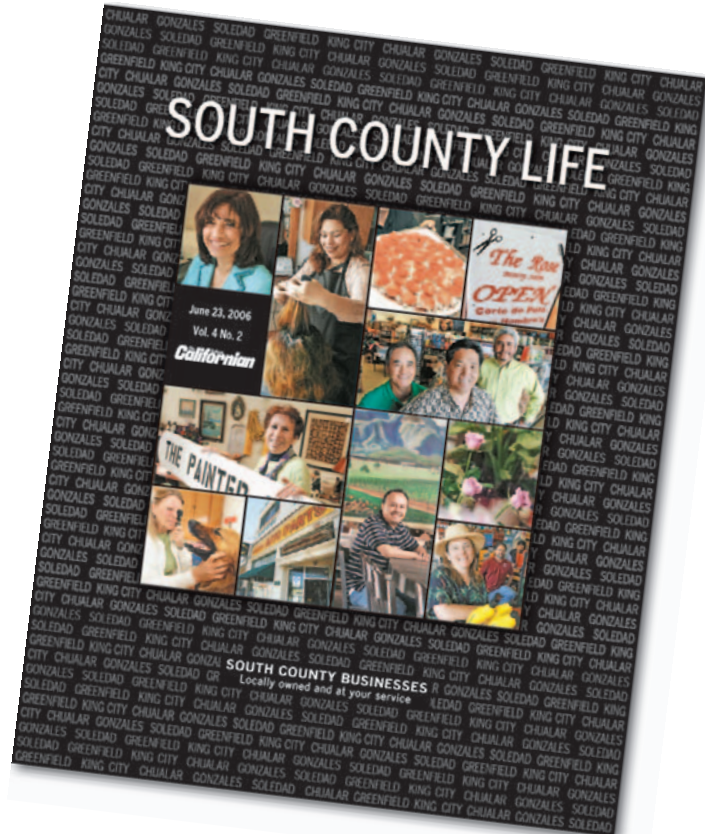
That's what happened with Cliff Vasquez, now 31, who began his working life at age 12 mopping floors for Ali Khahagi, who developed south county's Cheezer's Gourmet Pizza chain. Vasquez now runs the chain's south county operation and says the Khahagis are like family to him.

But these small-business owners also say operating in south county can be challenging, because so many residents leave the area to do their shopping.

While prices may not be rock bottom and selection may be limited at their stores, these business owners offer a bonus to their towns: They live there and they care. They help build the community and hold it together.

We're proud to present some of their stories in this issue of South County Life.

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