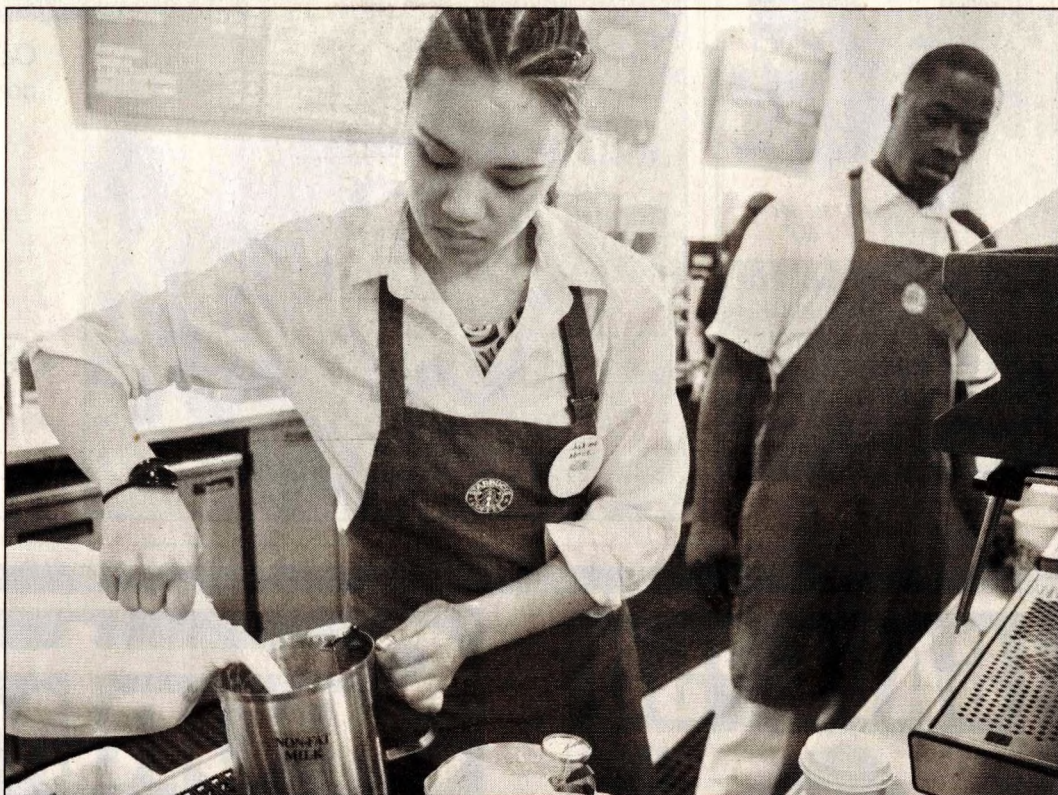


"I never would have thought that I'd be in East Palo Alto, stopping for coffee at Starbucks on my way to Design Expo."

— JESSICA TITUS



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Sosia Fisiiahi, left, pours milk for steaming as co-worker Joe Dillard looks on at the new store Thursday. Most of the 25 employees live in East Palo Alto, a company official said.

East P.A. Starbucks keeps retail renaissance brewing

By **Thaai Walker**
Mercury News

Thursday morning, Jessica Titus found herself doing something she once would have never imagined: sitting in East Palo Alto outside a Starbucks coffeehouse enjoying a cup of joe.

The Hayward woman was one of the first customers to visit the new East Palo Alto store, which opened quietly Thursday in the city's 3-year-old Ravenswood 101 shopping center. It is the latest chain store to invest in East Palo Alto, a city that struggled for many years to persuade retailers to set up shop.

Titus had been zipping along Highway 101 when she spotted a sign that told her Design Expo, a home decorating showroom store, was just off the next exit. She pulled into the shopping center but discovered she was too early — Design Expo wasn't open yet. She looked around, saw the Starbucks next to the Good Guys! across the parking lot and headed over.

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The Starbucks opened quietly Thursday in the Ravenswood 101 shopping center.

Design Expo," said Titus, who passed the time sitting in the sun drinking coffee and reading a newspaper. "I used to pass this area for years and there was nothing here. I'm very happy for the community."

East Palo Alto had no place to buy an espresso until August, when a local couple opened Latte Dah, a drive-through stand at University

Avenue and Bay Road.

Titus didn't actually buy a cup of coffee Thursday. Starbucks had planned to open early that morning, but computer problems kept the doors closed until noon. A Starbucks employee stood outside offering free coffee and pastries from a cart.

A grand opening is planned for next Friday.

Starbucks District Manager Brian Gibson said most of the 25 employees come from East Palo Alto. The store is part of a joint venture effort with Johnson Development, Earvin "Magic" Johnson's company. The partnership was formed to develop Starbucks stores in under-served communities throughout the country. To date, there are 32 such stores.

In subsequent weeks, a Togo's sandwich shop will move in next door, as well as California Bank and Trust, the community's first bank since the 1980s.

"It's all part of our steady progress," Mayor Duane Bay said.

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