

AUGUST 2007

WILLIAMSBURG'S

Next Door Neighbors

VOL 1, ISSUE 5

Where local viewpoints and experiences are shared

PRICELESS

BIG opportunities

for small business in Williamsburg

BUSINESS NETWORKING

Do you have the net?

Q&A with six small businesses

What are their challenges?

**Steven Yavorsky,
Assistant Director**

**JCC Office of
Economic
Development**

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Big Opportunities for Small Business is the theme of this issue of *Next Door Neighbors*. I hope it is of interest to you regardless of whether you own a small business or work for someone else.

Most of us at one time or another have given thought to owning and operating our own business. For some, it may have been a fleeting thought on a particularly bad day at work. For others, it may have been an idea pondered for a long while – something to think about while washing dishes, cutting grass or driving that short distance to work.

This issue is for all of you who have dreamed about one day running your own business in Williamsburg, and for those of you who are already working to make your dreams a reality.

If you think about it, even those of you who have never given the first thought to opening your own small business are certainly impacted by the sheer volume of them in the Williamsburg area. Small businesses are on almost every major street and corner. They exist because they provide products and services that you rely upon, sometimes ones you may even take for granted.

You might have your clothes dry cleaned by a small business. Or perhaps you stop in for lunch at a local deli or sub shop. Maybe you want to get your hair or nails done, or you have a fashion boutique that you particularly like to browse. You might need an oil change or brake work done on your car, or you may need a home improvement specialist to build a deck on your home. Chances are you do business with a Williamsburg small business almost every week, if not daily.

Many small businesses that operate in the Williamsburg area are fortunate. Whether their sales come from tourists, locals like you

or a combination of both, they are probably in a good position to find ways to increase business. I don't mean that it is easy to increase sales or profitability, or that it will happen quickly. I just mean that Williamsburg is a growing market with a healthy consumer base and that tilts the odds of being successful in the business owner's favor.

There are numerous other factors that play into the success of any business – anything from how long a business has been in operation, to the product or service offered, to what the competitive landscape looks like, to how well a business serves its customers with quality and integrity.

Factors such as these weigh into the success equation just as much as being located in a growth market.

As my writers and I began working on material for this issue, we were impressed by the number of ways someone in the small business arena could find assistance. The Williamsburg area is a progressive community in many ways, and it is particularly fortunate to have so many resources enabling an entrepreneurial spirit for operating a small business to blossom and grow.

Williamsburg business people are good business people. They demonstrate that in the way they work to help one another become successful. While there are formal networks in place designed to help you improve your business, there are equally as many informal networks that are fueled by experience, generosity and the desire to see someone make it. I know this because I, too, have been touched by individuals like that.

That neighborly spirit is alive and well in the Williamsburg business community just as it is in our neighborhoods. I hope you find this issue informative and inspiring. ■



Meredith Collins, Publisher

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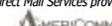
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BIG OPPORTUNITIES

for small business in Williamsburg

By Karen Haywood Queen

There was a time when the model for a small business was a mom-and-pop shop with the family living above the store, always there for a customer's needs. While that type of business has evolved over years, many small business owners continue to earn their living face-to-face with the locals and tourists who do business with them. Some rely simply on the telephone, spiral notebooks, quality products and responsive service for their success.

But alongside these businesses, a new breed is growing. Today's small business in the Williamsburg area may involve a much greater degree of technology than ever before – allowing access to the global Internet market along with the tourist and local markets. Williamsburg has a growing economy that is diversifying and with this diversification comes some growing pains and increased competition.

While some of the area's small businesses are feeling the effects of increased competition or short-lived periods of

soft sales, Williamsburg offers a very attractive environment for a small business to be successful. A growth market with an attractive consumer base provides a solid foundation for

small businesses. In addition, there are many resources available to assist a small business along the way.

New entrants into the small business arena in the Williamsburg area can benefit from support organizations as well. Alongside solid consumer demographics and tourism are entities within the city and county government, Chamber of Commerce, the College of William & Mary and local businesses who have a vested interest in the area's growth and who offer programs or assistance designed to help small businesses move in the right direction.

"We definitely have a vibrant small business industry here," says Steven Yavorsky, assistant director of the James City County Office of Economic Development. "We have the tourism industry, access to military installations and we're between two major metro

small business is a technology incubator to utilize the entrepreneurial spirit we've found in the James City County area."

The James City County Technology Incubator (JCCTI), located on Palmer Lane, offers mentoring classes, networking opportunities and conference rooms to clients located either in the incubator or in home offices. It brings together the experience and knowledge of professionals in the area with budding companies in hopes of building a technology corridor in the Peninsula area. Participating organizations include James City County Economic Development Authority, Virginia's Center for Innovation and Technology, and the Hampton Roads Technology Council.

Some local businesses are capitalizing on opportunities to do business over the Internet. One example is La Tienda (Spanish for 'The

Store'), an Internet order firm that sells food products and other items from Spain. The Harris family founded La Tienda in 1996 in



Steven Yavorsky, Assistant Director of the JCC Office of Economic Development, says the small business industry is vibrant in the Williamsburg area.

areas. We have a lot of people here who are able to sell their products and services to the Richmond area as well as the Norfolk area. One of the initiatives we've done to help out

part to capitalize on family members' love for all things Spanish. La Tienda outgrew several locations before moving to an industrial park in Toano.

"They've done an excellent job of finding these products and finding a way to sell them in the United States," says Bill Bean, director of the College of William & Mary's Technology and Business Center. "They're also a stunningly good example of the use of web technology. The key has been to find ways to use the Internet to generate sales. They truly understand how hard it is to do business on the Internet. They study how people use their site. They study what people might be searching for that might lead them to the site. La Tienda ads pop up on Google. They really understand how to drive traffic to their web site."

There are also other ways small business owners can improve their business skills and capabilities. They can take advantage of several MBA programs offered at The College of William & Mary. These include a traditional MBA, a flexible MBA with classes offered at nights and on weekends, and an executive MBA intended for businesspeople with experience.

Many small businesses also find ways to serve the tourist industry. The Jamestown 400th events have raised the area's profile on a national and international level and may continue to have a positive and lasting impact on tourism for years to come.

"There is a huge opportunity for our businesses to capture the tourist business," Yavorsky says. "Our tourist season is much longer than the typical tourist season. It starts with spring break and families coming in March and April. It continues through the summer and even throughout the fall because of the moderate climate here. In the winter, Colonial Williamsburg has done a great job of capturing the excitement of the Christmas holiday season. You'll find a lot of tourist-centered businesses can stay busy for 8 to 10 months out of the year."

Of course, not all businesses offer products or services that target the tourist market. Some of the areas small businesses rely primarily on business from local consumers to be

successful. They have to find ways to compete in a growing market that offers diversity and competition.

"I'm optimistic about the retail and service sectors," says Bob Hershberger, executive vice president of the Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance. "Those are two of our small business components where we're starting to see significant increases. The prime reasons are growth in the population and the segment of folks that are in their late 50's and older."

More small service businesses are starting to serve retirees and those eyeing retirement, he says. These include medical practices that



Bob Hershberger, executive vice president of the Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance, is optimistic about the retail and service sectors.

specialize in geriatric care, financial planners to help with retirement, elder law firms and continuous care retirement communities.

On the retail side, Hershberger says he hasn't heard much talk about a slow-down although he acknowledged that some retail businesses are concerned about all the new, planned and proposed retail in the area, including New Town, High Street and The Marquis. "As others come on line, are we starting to get over-saturated in retail development," he muses. "There are some who would say yes we are. Others would say we are close to it. Others would say we are far from it."

From his standpoint, Hershberger is more
- continued on page 6

Want to know more about SCORE?

- SCORE was formed in 1964, and provides a public service to America by offering small business advice and training. It is headquartered in Herndon, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

- It is considered to be "Counselors to America's Small Business" and

is America's premier source of free and confidential small business advice for entrepreneurs.

- SCORE is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization dedicated to the formation, growth and success of small businesses nationwide.

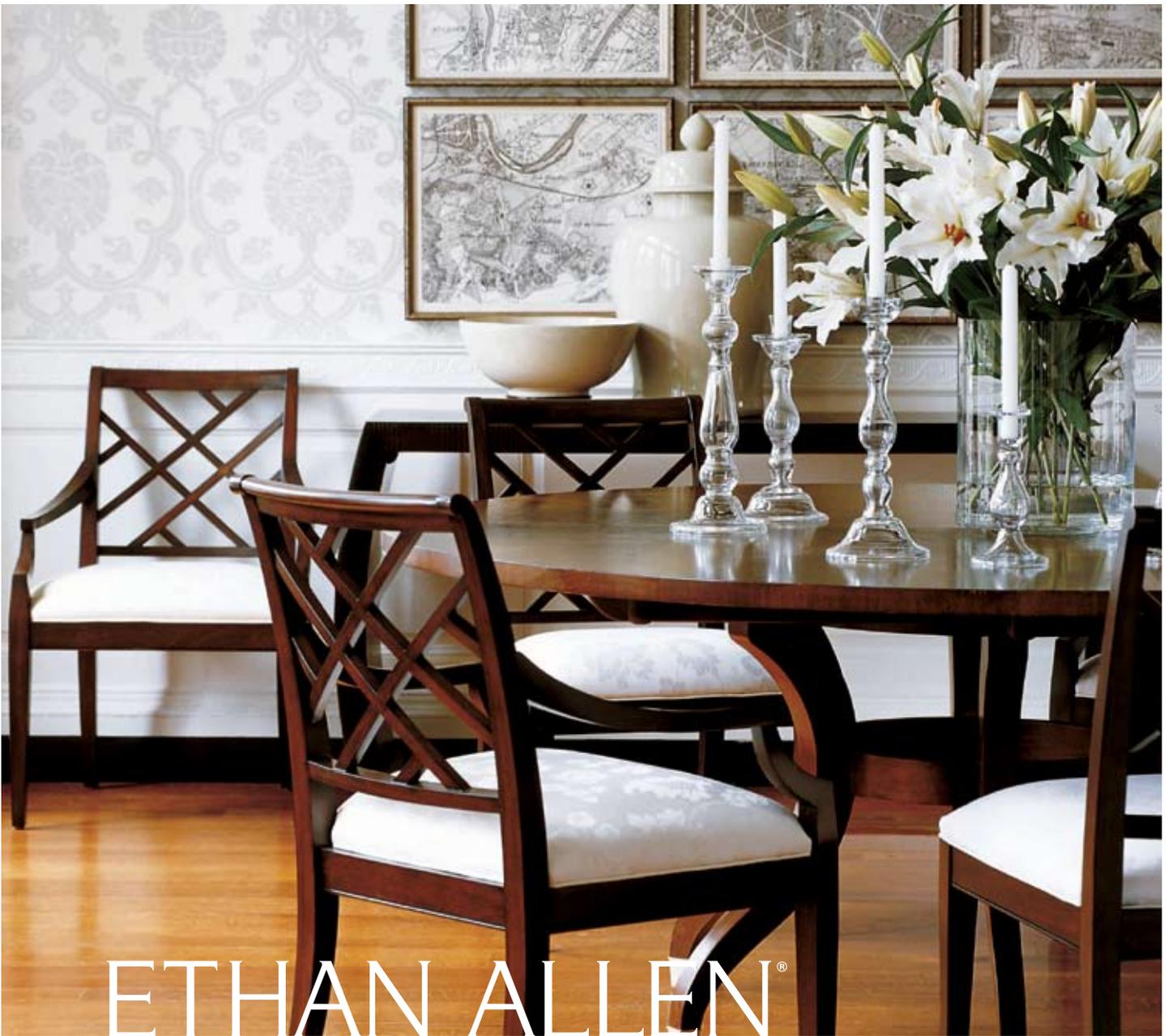
- The organization has helped more than 7.5 million small businesses in the United States.

- SCORE's 10,500 volunteer counselors have more than 600 business

skills. Volunteers are working or retired business owners, executives and corporate leaders who share their wisdom and lessons learned in business.

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concerned with whether there will be enough workers to fill all the jobs. A study for the Chamber by Chmura Economics and Analytics, released earlier this year, predicts the area will need 50,000 workers over the next 10 years to fill jobs in projects that are in development, currently under construction, or approved but not yet built, Hershberger says. "That's not even speaking of developments not yet planned or announced," he says. "The bigger concern than the competition is the lack of employees."

The Chamber of Commerce offers programs and services to support small businesses as well. Members of the local SCORE chapter (a non-profit national group of retired business executives) offer free advice to new businesses. "We do upwards of 500 counseling sessions a year," says Alan Wonsowski, chairman of Williamsburg SCORE. "Seventy-five percent of that is people who want to start businesses - home-based or storefront."

Financial institutions such as local and regional banks are also willing to be flexible to help small businesses gain financing. "They have really instilled in their loan officers the

leeway to help out the small businesses," Yavorsky says. "There are a lot of banks in this area that really pride themselves on their support of local businesses. They have both the resources to lend and the resources to listen."

The James City County's Office of Economic Development doesn't merely focus on attracting new businesses, but also on retaining the ones that are already here. Yavorsky and others visit existing businesses to learn how the Economic Development Office can help meet their needs. "Of course, every economic development office's goal is recruiting major projects nationally and internationally," Yavorsky says. "We also have made a strong push for expansions and retention in the area. Just because a company is already here doesn't mean it doesn't deserve our attention."

Yavorsky, who worked in the Richmond area before coming here, also appreciates the regionalism and teamwork locally and in Hampton Roads. In the Richmond metro

area, each locality thinks of itself as distinct from the others: Richmond, Henrico County, Chesterfield County, Hanover County. "Here, we realize we're all partners in this together,"

he said. "We realize that anything that can support Norfolk, Virginia Beach or Newport News is going to benefit us too. Hampton Roads is very broad - it goes all the way to Chesapeake and Suffolk. We realize their success is going to benefit us as well."

The area's growing popularity as a retirement community is also helping small businesses thrive. In fact, some of these retirees end up un-retiring after they've enjoyed months of playing golf or traveling. "We have found that retired executives come here with the anticipation of never putting on a business suit again," Yavorsky says. "That lasts 8 or 10 months before they start getting bored. We have spouses in the same vein who end up starting a small business."

New retail is helping spur more start-ups, he says. "I think the real driver here is the

Williamsburg provides a great climate for small businesses to thrive.

- Michele M. DeWitt

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construction of all of these high-end shopping centers such as NewTown and High Street and Marquis, which are creating more small businesses, primarily in the retail and restaurant area. Most of the small businesses we see are primarily in the service areas and retail areas. The growth in population is supporting these businesses."

Finally, there's the cachet of living and working in a well-known, historic area where many people vacation and many others aspire to live. "The city of Williamsburg is often called the smallest city with the largest international address," says Michele M. DeWitt, Williamsburg's economic development manager. "Williamsburg provides a great climate for small businesses to thrive. Two things rise to the top of the reasons for this great climate: tourists and a prestigious address. Each year, 8.8 million people visit Williamsburg, providing customers for a variety of hospitality, retail and restaurant service

es. The synergy of all the special, high quality activities people find in Williamsburg provides a great niche for small businesses to thrive among our large attractions. The city of Williamsburg has the most prestigious address in Virginia and small businesses use this as a

competitive edge locally and globally. With 21st century technology, many small businesses can operate anywhere in the world."

Whether it's a small local business, a web-based business or a combination of the two, the Williamsburg area offers a fertile environment for an entrepreneurial spirit. The success of any new business depends on a number of factors, but the odds of growing into a viable business increase in a healthy, competitive growth market. The Williamsburg area shows no signs of being anything but that. ■



Michele M. DeWitt is Williamsburg's economic development manager

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For every person in Williamsburg who has started their own small business, there are probably thousands of people who have thought about starting one, and just never have. Starting your own business can be an attractive alternative to working for someone else, but getting started can be daunting, especially if you don't have family or friends with direct experience who can give you guidance

to help you get started.

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) of Hampton Roads is a government funded organization that can act like that experienced family member or friend. What's more, they have the combined resources and expertise to be able to give you much more insight into how to get a small business started than all of your aunts, uncles, cousins and

best friends combined.

The SBDC serves all of Hampton Roads including Williamsburg and shares office space with the Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Alliance. It is a program that is part of the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce and Thomas Nelson Community College in partnership with the United States Small Business Administration.

Debbie Wright is Williamsburg's business analyst who provides assistance to area residents who either own a small business and need help with a particular concern or are thinking about starting a business and need some coaching on how to get started. "Our focus is helping businesses to succeed," Wright said.

The SBDC does that in a number of ways. They provide one-on-one counseling to existing business owners who want assistance in a particular area. They hold seminars and they conduct training through specific courses they offer that are tailored to the small business

NOT SURE WHAT TO DO NEXT WITH YOUR SMALL BUSINESS?

HELP

IS HERE

By Meredith Collins



Debbie Wright
Business Analyst, Small Business Development Center

owner. Their services include business planning which assists business people with key factors that are related to the potential success of their business. They provide access to economic and business databases, and teach management skills to help business owners improve their operational effectiveness.

"We have a financial analyst in Hampton, Bill Burford, who is available to provide analysis and counseling," Wright remarked.

"He knows with the different industries what financial ratios you expect to see and can help business owners evaluate whether they are in the right place financially."

The SBDC has access to databases that small companies can't always afford – like Dunn & Bradstreet. They can also provide demographic information and other relevant marketing data to help small businesses make informed decisions.

"We have another group that does research for the whole country," Wright said. "They're down in Texas. Just for SBDC's. So we can put a question in and they can do all kinds of research and access different things and send the answers back to us."

If the SBDC doesn't have the expertise with the nine employees in this region, they will help you network with other area resources that can provide the type of assistance you need.

"I'm not an expert in any one particular area, but I can help get [clients] to the right people to talk to," Wright explained. "I can direct them to organizations that can help them make that decision. And certainly I can give them some feedback from what I have seen in the past."

While Wright holds an MBA from UNC Wilmington and networks with other highly skilled members of the SBDC staff, she recognizes that they can't be all things to all people. With their extensive management and financial consulting backgrounds, they are well equipped to handle many questions but they also network with many professionals who can provide even more indus-

try specific guidance. They also have insight into ways small businesses can utilize existing resources to save money.

"For example, VecTec out of Christopher Newport University has grants for setting up websites in some of the counties," Wright stated. "James City County participates. Grants are available for retail companies who want to set up a website. This is through the Retail Alliance."

In Williamsburg, Wright says that there are many common ways she assists people: There is the woman who is thinking of starting a business but does not know how to get started – where to get a business license or who to pay taxes to. *Wright shows her a diagram with*

step-by-step directions. A couple has decided to take that leap into starting a business and have written a business plan and need someone with experience to review it. *Wright reads the business plan and offers suggestions on ways it could be improved.* A man doesn't know how to get a start financially. *Wright educates him on the Small Business Administration (SBA) and how they back loans.* A man in a two year old business has questions about how to grow it and make it profitable. *Wright listens to his particular challenges and offers sound advice.* A new business owner doesn't know how to advertise, how much to spend or where he should invest his money. *Wright helps him define his target customer and develop a sensible plan.*

One of the best things about Williamsburg's SBDC is that the services are free of charge. There may be small fees associated with seminars and courses, but the day to day consultative resources that the organization provides cost nothing but your time.

The SBDC is here for any of you out there who are still thinking about starting your own small business and haven't taken that first step, or for those of you who have and just need a little help.

Don't be timid... Debbie Wright is waiting for your call. 757-229-6511 Ext. 232 ■

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small business Q&A

Next Door Neighbors asked area small business owners from different industries about their business - what kinds of challenges they face and how they feel about their future. Here is what they have to say.

By Linda Landreth Phelps and Suzi Drake

FLOWER SHOP

Morrison's Flowers and Gifts
Arlene Williams
Owner

Four and a half years ago, newlyweds Bill and Arlene Williams fulfilled a dream by purchasing a small florist shop from a local doctor. In the years since then, they have made some changes to reflect their style and personal vision for the business.



Arlene Williams is the owner of Morrison's Flowers and Gifts in Williamsburg

Q: First, can you tell us a little about your business?

A: We bought the store but decided to keep the original name because it had a ten year history in the

area. I had a lot of experience in business management, administration, and event planning, but I've always loved flower arranging as a hobby and had some creative skills that I could bring to bear, too.

Q: How has your business changed over the time you have owned it?

A: We carry more giftware now, but I'd say about 65% of our sales are still flowers. There's more emphasis on special events such as weddings, and I've increased my staff to

five full-time and four part-time employees.

Q: What are some of the biggest challenges you face right now?

A: I'd say the rising cost of fuel has impacted me the most, both in our delivery expenses and price of the stock we buy. The increase in commercial rent has been significant, too, as well as the cost of the health insurance coverage we offer employees. Add all of that together, and we have to work hard to make a profit.

Q: What do you like most about what you do?

A: I love the feedback from customers after an event such as a wedding or funeral, when they tell me how much the flowers meant to them. I really like the creative side of floral arranging. There's a lot of job satisfaction in this, and my wonderful staff is like family.

Q: What do you see for the future?

A: I want to improve the environment by recycling whenever I can. For instance, if people will bring in their old vases, they can exchange them for free flowers. There's no doubt that Williamsburg will continue to grow and Morrison's will expand to meet the need.

PLEASE SEE NEXT Q&A ON PAGE 11.

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Dr. J.H. Boyer,
Owner

Twenty years ago, Dr. J. Hardin Boyer was working in the education field in Oklahoma. He and his wife were natives of West Point and they wanted to retire and return to the Williamsburg vicinity. After studying the need for jewelry stores in this area, he felt he'd found a niche that he could fill successfully.



Dr. Hardin Boyer is the owner of Boyer's Diamond and Gold Source.

Q: Dr. Boyer, can you tell us about your business?

A: We carry high-quality jewelry at a discount. We buy directly from the largest suppliers of fine stones and gold. I travel extensively, particularly to Antwerp, where I personally choose the diamonds.

Q: How has your business changed over the last 20 years?

A: Boyer's was the first tenant when this shopping mall was built, and through the last twenty years we've expanded five times. The last time we gutted everything and installed columns and cherry display cabinets

to reflect the Colonial Williamsburg style.

Q: What is your biggest challenge?

A: I think it's to stay current in style; jewelry goes in and out of fashion just as clothing does. Of course, an ongoing challenge is to locate and purchase the best merchandise.

Q: What is the most enjoyable aspect of your business?

A: The most beautiful thing on earth is a diamond. I had a customer the other day who bought his wife a nice piece of jewelry. I asked if it was a special anniversary or birthday and he said "No, I just want to make her happy!" That's gratifying.

Q: What does the future hold for Boyer's?

A: I foresee continued growth and expansion since our business increases 20% or more per year. I'll be here for a long time.

PLEASE SEE NEXT Q&A ON PAGE 17.



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Serving Up Their Best in a Competitive Marketplace

By Suzanne S. Lanier

The restaurant industry in the Williamsburg area is a vital part of the local economy. It is perhaps one of the small business segments with the most members; there are over 130 restaurants in the Williamsburg/James City County area (not counting fast food). Some of these restaurants have served locals and tourists for years, some for a while and others are new entries into the market.

More than 80 of these restaurants are members of the Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association (WARA). Rex Hoover is serving his second year as president of WARA, which was organized in the late 1990's by local restaurateurs to promote and protect the economic interests of the area restaurant industry.

"My goals as president are to grow the membership and to see a certificate program in Food Service and Hospitality up and running," Hoover said. "We're partnering with Thomas Nelson Community College on this project and expect the program to be available this fall at the McLaw's Circle campus."

Dennis White is the owner of the Aberdeen Barn.



WARA recently added a director of organizational development to its staff to keep abreast of government regulations that deal with issues ranging from food coatings to meals tax, and to serve as a liaison from the restaurants to the association board when their voices need to be heard.

"The association is large enough now to justify the services of the director," Hoover explained, "but the other benefits are just as valuable – cooperative marketing with local and regional governments and tourism partners, the WARA Gift Certificate Program and Dining Guide Listing, training and networking opportunities."

Rex Hoover is experienced in the restaurant business having spent most of his adult years in the industry. When he first moved to Williamsburg in 1998, he was the manager of Cracker Barrel. He is now the owner of Spectators Family Sports Pub, which opened in Monticello Marketplace in January 2006.

"When we first opened, there weren't so many places to eat on this side of town," Hoover said. "People were looking for places to go that were close by. Now, there are a number of others and the competition is strong. I have been surprised by people's loyalty to a place they like. Most of my business is from locals, but the restaurant draws well from tourists and timeshares because of the location and the sports theme."

Every restaurant has its own set of challenges depending on its location, competition and other factors including the type of food they serve. "Marketing is my biggest challenge," Hoover said. "There are a lot of different media to work with and a diverse group to market to. It is my most time-consuming job."

Dennis White, owner of the well-established

Aberdeen Barn on Richmond Road, remembers a time when the restaurant industry was much smaller and there was nothing between his restaurant and the Pottery except four and a half miles of fields and a few houses.



Rex Hoover is the president of WARA and the owner of Spectators Family Sports Pub.

"My dad and his partner started the restaurant in September 1974," White said. "The biggest challenge in those early years was keeping up with the sheer volume of customers. We'd have 50 to 60 people standing in line some nights. There weren't many restaurants in town then for a nice, reasonably priced, sit-down dinner. The Jefferson and The Lobster House were just down the street to the east. The Jefferson has operated continuously

since it opened and The Lobster House is now Country Harvest Buffet. The Colonial Restaurant transitioned to Colonial Pancake House. The Yorkshire, which is still serving, was on Route 60 on the other side of Colonial Williamsburg."

The Aberdeen Barn built its reputation on excellent food and service during that time and word-of-mouth continued to develop a strong and loyal following. While White's business volume remains consistent throughout the year, he does hire one extra server from July through October to help accommodate tourists and visitors attending fall events.

"A young lady from Poland is my extra help from July through October," White said. "This will be the fourth year that she has come to the United States to work for me." White acknowledged that it has become more difficult for restaurants to find enough hometown help during the busy season. "There has been such tremendous growth in the food service industry in Williamsburg that there aren't enough local kids to fill the seasonal jobs," White explained. "Lots of area restaurants are hiring international students now."

White is fortunate to maintain his staff during this time of year. Three of his key employees have been with him for over 20 years. He attributes the longevity of his staff to treating them with respect and providing benefits that are not typically offered to food service employees. He doesn't miss the little bit of extra profit that goes towards paying for benefits, but he would miss his employees. "They are like my family," White said.

Mike Jeo and Eric Ramos are co-owners of Center Street Grill in NewTown, an area restaurant that is a few months away from two years in business. Jeo and Ramos have known each other for years, and their career paths in food service crossed many times. They knew they wanted to collaborate on a restaurant and liked the environment in Williamsburg. When NewTown was in its infancy, Ramos knew it was the right place and the right time. They opened Center Street Grill in November 2005 just down the street from NewTown Cinemas.

Although the venue was a draw in itself, it was one of only a handful of restaurants open in NewTown at that time. There was still a lot

of construction going on that could keep people away and promoting their business was a top priority. Jeo and Ramos used a variety of marketing techniques and advertised using different media to introduce the restaurant to the local population.

"The local community embraced us, and as more new businesses open in NewTown, tourist traffic is picking up." Ramos said. "We are pleased with the progress after a year and a half."

Jeo and Ramos are also members of WARA. They enjoy being part of the community alliance of restaurant owners and depend on the information pipeline. "The networking is great. We like developing camaraderie and staying competitive at the same time," Ramos said.

Howard Hopkins, part owner and manager of Food for Thought on Richmond Road, has faced different challenges operating an independent restaurant in Williamsburg. Hopkins is experienced in the restaurant business having been part owner of three other restaurants before coming to the area. Those res-

taurants were in close proximity to beaches in Maryland and Delaware, and Hopkins said he didn't expect the demographics in Williamsburg to be so different.

"At the beach, people own condos and beach houses and visit often or stay through the season," Hopkins said. "We served the same guests at least once a week. Here, we're dealing with motel and timeshare guests who visit the area once a year. We are at a disadvantage in attracting the tourist market. It is hard to compete with the chain restaurants. Their logos, colors and signage are easily recognized."

Hopkins has built his restaurant business primarily on the locals who give him consistent business. He estimates 60 to 70% of his guests are locals who enjoy the food and the unique theme tied to the name, Food for Thought. As a child, the news would be on the TV during dinner. Hopkins remembers it often-times generating family conversations. He wanted to create an atmosphere in his restaurant that would evoke thought and conversation and would be a tribute to the scientists, business and social leaders that make the world a better place.

"Inspiring people come from all over the map, and our food is just as diverse," Hopkins said. "There is a meaningful and fully intended correlation between the items on the menu and the great people of the world." Hopkins admits that he misses time in the kitchen to create menu items, but he enjoys chatting with his guests, making sure they are happy and answering questions about the quotes printed on the walls. The motto is, after all, 'Eat Drink and Think'.

The growth in the restaurant industry in the last decade has been tremendous. Increased competition forces restaurants to examine their competitive advantages and to capitalize on them in ways that will set them apart from the restaurants down the street, next door or even across town. For the consumer, this generally means better values and service. For the restaurants, it means finding new ways to increase market share through promoting their strengths to consumers to get new faces and hungry mouths through their doors.

Given the experience and know-how it requires to successfully operate a restaurant in a competitive marketplace, Williamsburg diners won't be disappointed. Rest assured that the talent Williamsburg attracts in the restaurant industry will translate into even more growth and savory dining experiences for us all. ■



Mike Jeo is co-owner of Center Street Grill.

Are You Working Without a Net?

By Linda Landreth Phelps

Taking a risk, stepping out with no backup and no guarantee of success, is known as “working without a net.” In the business arena, friends and colleagues who work together can act as a synergistic safety net for one another.

It’s said that on average each person knows more than 250 contacts; each of those people is an opportunity. What if you could reach out to those 250 people and gain access to the other 249 contacts that each of them knows?

This interactive concept forms the basis of networking. Business-to-business networking is about building relationships based on trust, helping others, and, yes, helping your own business to grow along the way. Much of Williamsburg’s networking takes place informally - on golf courses, at the weekly Christian men’s breakfasts, at the Business and Professional Woman’s Club meetings, Rotary lunches, or is naturally carried out as part of profession-specific gatherings. Additionally, there are many formal networking groups, both franchise and grassroots organizations, springing up.

The way it works is simple. Within a group, each category of business is represented by a member who refers a client to fellow members in inter-related fields. Perhaps a real estate agent who has just sold a house recommends a mortgage broker who recommends an insurance agent in a natural progression. Sometimes that agent will also list a house in need of repair; the business cards of a handyman service or carpet cleaner are then given to the client, or a fellow member is given a lead to follow up. The agent may be asked if he knows a good physical therapist for

his client’s mother—and he just happens to have a card in his briefcase for one that has been screened by the officers of his networking group and that he can confidently recommend.

The size of these groups varies from quite large to smaller and more intimate.

“I’d say that at least 35% of my clients come from referrals directly attributed to membership in my network.”

- Nathan Hill

Obviously, the larger the net, the more potential business generated, but there are advantages to joining a small group, too. Mary Beth Gibson is the Vice President of The Leading Edge, a group with nineteen current members.

“I credit the Leading Edge for the growth of my company, The Entrepreneur’s Source, in the Williamsburg area. The nature of what I do, which is helping entrepreneurs build their own successful business ventures through coaching, depends on referrals. I’m really pleased with all of the contacts they’ve brought me and the clients I’ve gained as a result of the relationships developed in that group.”

Last year, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, the group was also there for her. “These people really stepped up and supported me and my family. It’s not just about business,” she says.

The character of different groups can vary as widely as their size. Some emphasize and serve the more “white collar” businesses such as banking, engineering, architecture, and real estate, while others concentrate on the service or hospitality industries. Many are a mélange of them all. Though there are women-only groups, attendees usually reflect an approximate 60/40 split of male to female and the majority fall into the 30 to 60 years age range. Since most networking groups gather immediately before the usual work day begins and reflect the diversity of careers in Williamsburg, the dress can be flip-flops or Ferragamo, Brooks Brothers or Banana Republic.

A commitment to regular attendance is crucial, and if a member can’t be there, it’s expected that they arrange for a substitute in their field to attend in their place. Some people have had these networking groups work so well and bring so much success that they’ve actually had to drop out for lack of time.

Most people come to their first meeting because they received a personal invitation. The Williamsburg Business Exchange chapter of BNI, or Business Network International, a franchise whose philosophy is “Givers Gain,” is presided over by J. Nathan Hill, an agent with Long & Foster Realtors. A relative newcomer to Williamsburg, he and Debbie Henry, a local mortgage banker, started a new chapter in August of 2006 with four



J. Nathan Hill

or five others. From that nucleus grew their current membership of twenty.

"We were recently named one of the Peninsula's fastest growing BNI chapters. Due to a recent Visitor's Day, we'll be gaining at least eight and maybe twelve new members. In my own business, I'd say that at least 35% of my clients come from referrals directly attributed to membership in my network," Nathan reports.

Steve Rosen is a transplanted New Yorker, a local independent businessman who owned his own printing business for 13 years before he sold it and moved to Williamsburg five years ago. He now owns an independent print and media business, Reel Media, and is a broker who works from home (or out of places like Panera Bread, one of the favorite networking hot spots in New Town).

He is passionately enthusiastic about the benefits of membership in a group.

"The cost is negligible - ranging from \$200 to \$325 - and when you consider

that if you pick up just one account through a contact made at a meeting, it will most likely defray the costs of years of membership fees."

But it's not just handshakes, schmoozing and the exchange of cards. Some



Steve Rosen at a recent Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours.

groups offer training as well, such as how best to present yourself and your company, how to establish a relationship with clients, tips on developing public speak-

ing skills, and more.

The key to success is to be authentic, to build trust and relationships, and to look for opportunities to help others. A recent study says that an impressive 79 percent of all networkers surveyed reported that the business they generated from their organization had either met or exceeded their expectations.

In addition, they gained something intangible - the powerful sense of community that comes along with associating with like-minded people who have committed to helping one another succeed. It's a big world out there and it's nice

to know that you're not alone. With the wholehearted and enthusiastic help of friends and colleagues, there's no need to work without a net. ■

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Self-employment and business coaches are part of a growing market to support peoples' personal and professional growth. They help people not only get into business but also stay in business. This emerging industry also includes personal trainers, life coaches, and executive coaches.

If you are someone who wants to start your own business and you need special attention and expertise to help you get started, you may want to consider hiring a professional who can do just that.

How would it help you to work with a coach?

Working with a coach can help you assess business ownership as a viable option and can assist with the following:

- Identifying your strengths, aptitudes, interests, and skills
- Defining your personal and professional goals, needs, and expectations
- Determining how you want your life to look in three to five years
- Obtaining information about business models that you can leverage to produce the results you want
- Staying focused on your objectives
- Working through fears and insecurities
- Providing resources for small business loans, business plan development, market data, and other valuable information

Mary Beth Gibson is the owner of The Entrepreneur's Source, a local company that provides one-on-one professional guidance to individuals who want to start their own business. She is a graduate of William and Mary with a 20 year career in Human Resources.

Next Door Neighbors met with Gibson to



Mary Beth Gibson is the owner of The Entrepreneur's Source, a local company that helps small businesses become more successful.

find out more about her business and ways she works with Williamsburg area locals:

NDN: How does The Entrepreneur's Source help someone get started in a business?

Gibson: As a coach, I first spend time getting to know you and learning about your personal and professional goals so I can help you evaluate self-employment as an option to the traditional job market. If you want to explore business ownership, I can identify businesses (franchises, resales, distributorships) that I believe have the potential to meet your goals and then help you research them. Ours is a discovery process, so I offer a way for you to explore different business models in a safe

environment. I can also identify resources to help you once you have found the right business for you.

NDN: Can a coach give an individual one-on-one attention?

Gibson: Working with a coach is all about one-on-one attention and helping each client achieve their personal goals. I have clients all over the country, but I particularly enjoy working with local clients for the face-to-face interaction.

NDN: Will a coach help a person along the way by answering questions for that individual and giving specific direction?

Gibson: The role of a coach is often more about asking questions than providing the answers. When I ask questions, it helps you evaluate what is important to you. Of course, I also share a lot of information throughout the discovery process, and I help you get the answers to the questions that are important to you.

NDN: What if someone owns their own business, but they are not getting the results they want. Would a business coach help?

Gibson: Yes. Working with a coach will help you to identify the gaps that are interfering with your goals and to prioritize solutions to address those gaps. I also have relationships with a number of organizations that provide resources to help the small business owner succeed and can direct you according to your particular challenges. ■

For more information about enlisting a coach to start a business, visit:
www.theesource.com/mgibson

USED BOOK STORE

Mermaid Books Aurise Eaton, Owner

Her business card advertises "Tales...and tails." Aurise Eaton of Mermaid Books was working nearby when she established a relationship with an older couple who owned The Book House, a quirky shop tucked away in a basement off of Merchant's Square. When they decided to retire they sold the business to Aurise.

Q: Can you tell us a bit about your business, Aurise?

A: I bought the store six years ago and renamed it The Mermaid Shop just because I love mermaids. In my store I carry used and rare books, anything odd or unusual. I sell lots of the classics, histories, civil war and revolutionary war books, as well as antiques, collectibles and ephemera.

Q: How has your business changed over the last six years?

A: It hasn't changed very much; it's pretty steady, but I do sell online now. People like to actually handle a book—smell it, touch it—so I do more sales from the actual store.

Q: What are your biggest challenges?

A: When Parlett's, the store above me, moved, and the three businesses across the street (Blue Talon Bistro, The Peanut Shop, and Baskin-Robbins) had to close temporarily because of a fire, it was a struggle. Some thought Barnes & Noble opening up down the street would be a problem, but they actually send people to me if they don't carry what a customer may be looking for.

Q: What do you like most about what you do?

A: Reading, of course! I'm also a real "people person" and enjoy getting to know the locals and talking with the college students and tourists who wander in.

Q: And what do you like least?

A: Dusting!

Q: What do you think the next ten years will bring?

A: In ten years I hope to be retired, but I'll really miss my wonderful books and the friends I've made.



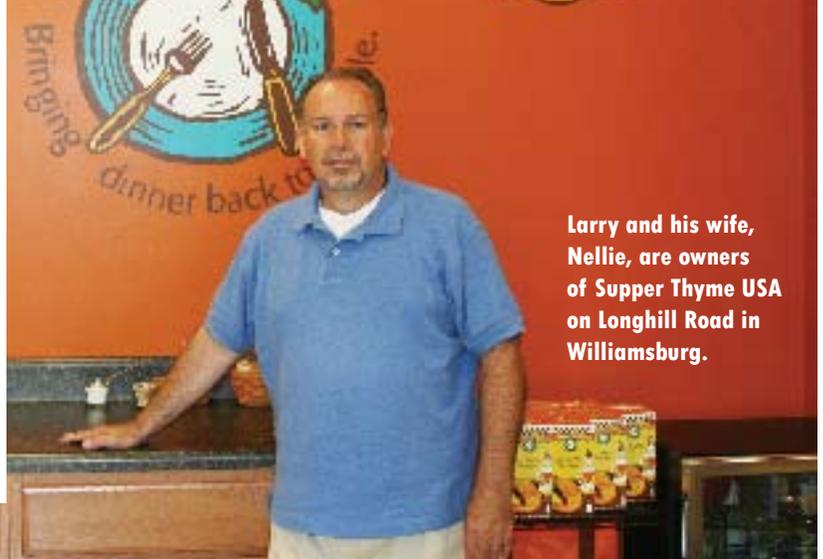
Aurise Eaton is the owner of Mermaid Books.

PLEASE SEE NEXT Q&A ON PAGE 18.

NEXT DOOR NEIGHBORS THE WAY BUYERS AND SELLERS CONNECT

"The response to our first ad in *Next Door Neighbors* has been excellent. Within days after it went out, we had numerous calls from people interested in our Beach Thyme package. Meredith did a great job designing our ad and was very easy to work with. We will continue to advertise in this publication!"

- Larry Williams



Larry and his wife, Nellie, are owners of Supper Thyme USA on Longhill Road in Williamsburg.

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Xactec

Marv Evans, Owner

Marv Evans wants people to think of technology as their friend. When he opened Xactec in 1991, he did so with the intention of helping other small businesses take advantage of the rapidly progressing world of technology without having to master the industry. That's his job. He and his dedicated crew of technologists strive to lift the esoteric veil from computers, networks, phone systems and more to show businesses how technology can work for them.

Q: Marv, what kinds of services does your business provide?

A: We provide a full suite of technology services - cabling installations, servers, networks, traditional computer installation, telephones and support. We offer an entire technology solution and have a passion for removing the mystique from technology.

Q: Why did you get into this business?

A: Technology is a business necessity, and it remains one of the biggest mysteries to business owners. I wanted to help other businesses address these mysteries and make sure they are using only what they need to. We are very sympathetic to businesses attempting to efficiently apply technology.

Q: How has your business changed since 1991?

A: I am a believer that technology and medicine are two disciplines that you can never, ever stop learning - the language, the products, the players change on a weekly basis. Technology is becoming more and more mobile and we are moving into an era when busi-

nesses are expecting technology to help them be more mobile. We are going in that direction. We have phone systems that use one number for desk, cell and home. The same goes for the computing side. People need to be able to access their desk computers from anywhere. Today's business technology al-

Q: What are some of the challenges you face?

A: Developing a culture within our company of lifelong learners and ensuring that the people we have, have a passion for keeping current and learning new technologies. When you have a business that is so dependent on relationships, you have to get the best people who have a passion for service as well as continuous learning.

Q: What opportunities do you see in this area for your business?

A: The great thing about it is that technology will only become more and more prevalent in all manners of life - private and business. I cannot imagine a time when technology becomes obsolete. Williamsburg is a healthy, growing community and it is steadily becoming more and more technology oriented. These are times when even the smallest business must employ some kind of technology, even if it is just a small Web page. We have the power to offer businesses the entire solution.

Q: What do you like most about your job?

A: Helping businesses make technology more of a friend than some sort of necessary evil.

Q: What do you look forward to in the future?

A: We continue to look forward to providing premier technology services to businesses in Williamsburg who understand what technology can do for them.

PLEASE SEE NEXT Q&A ON PAGE 19.



Marv Evans, owner of Xactec.

PET SERVICES

The Pet Resort at Greensprings

Marc and Liz Illman, Owners

When Marc and Liz Illman moved to Williamsburg ten years ago, they bought a horse boarding facility from an elderly couple. It looked to them like a dream come true. Set on 17 acres, it had scenic riding trails and unspoiled pasture land.

Q: Marc, can you tell us a little about The Pet Resort at Greensprings?

A: We provide a safe and loving environment for pets. In



Marc Illman at his facility with a customer's dog.

2005, we built a facility which is the largest in Williamsburg - 7,000 square feet - and it is climate controlled. We board both dogs and cats and also offer training classes and a Day Camp for regular customers as well as for visitors to the area.

Q: Why did you decide to get into this business?

A: Liz and I love animals. If you make your passion your business, it doesn't feel like you're going to work. We feel really lucky to be able to do this.

Q: How has your business changed over the last ten years?

A: We started out

growth there was such a need for more boarding facilities for smaller pets in this area that we decided to change our vision. Dogs are just small horses, we like to say. It was a logical progression.

Q: What are the biggest challenges you currently face?

A: Well, development is both a problem and an opportunity. If the surrounding land is built on, will the new neighbors object to the level of noise that naturally comes with this kind of business? Our customer base would be broadened, but it might hamper our ability to do business.

Q: What do you think the future will bring?

A: Currently, our business is growing over 20 to 30% every month. I can foresee that in the next year or two we may reach capacity, and we might have to turn customers away if we don't expand.

PLEASE SEE NEXT Q&A ON PAGE 22.

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Meet Steve Rose

2007 SMALL BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR

By Meredith Collins

Every year a local Chamber of Commerce member is honored as *Small Business Person of the Year* by the Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance. The person selected must be nominated for this recognition and is judged by criteria relating to their length of time in business, how well they serve the community, business growth and innovativeness, and other indicators of success.

In 2007, Steve Rose, owner of Williamsburg Event Rentals, received this honor. Fifteen years ago, Steve moved to the United States from England where he worked with his father in their garden center. It was there that he learned the importance of doing good work and developing relationships with people, especially customers.

It was almost 11 years ago that Steve started his small business in Williamsburg. What began as a custom awning company transitioned into an event rental company after only two years. He got his start in the business with some guidance from a friend who owned a similar business in Charlotte, NC. It was evident early on that he had his own vision about how to be successful.

"I took five credit cards, maxed them out, and bought some inventory," Steve explained. "I bought \$35,000 worth of inventory and just went from there and ba-

sically just stayed local right here in Williamsburg. I had like four or five tents, tables and chairs and just gradually built it up every year. The business grew 30 to 50% every year for the first eight or nine years."

While Steve recognizes that many businesses aren't always fortunate to realize those kinds of sales increases so early on, he also knows that he made some good decisions to help foster that kind of growth.

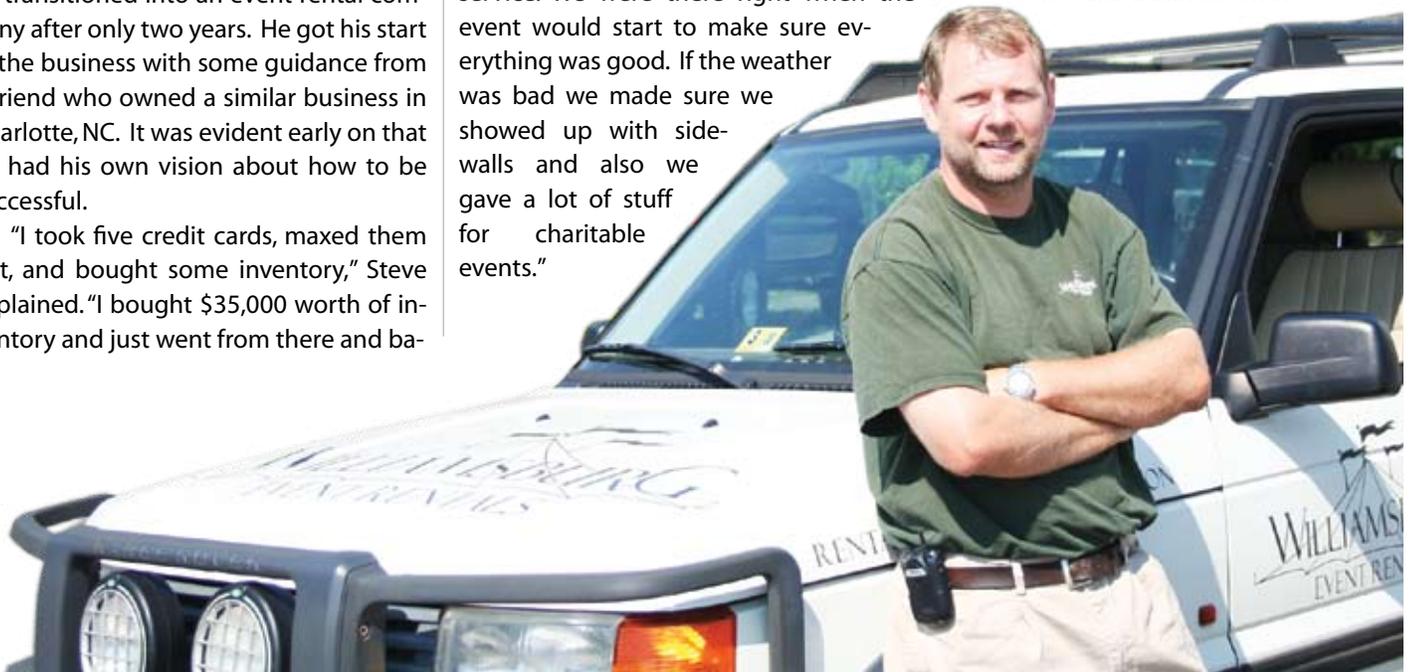
"We worked hard," Steve said. "And we offered great services in the community."

Relying on the business principles he learned by working with his father in England, Steve made a conscious choice to work closely with his customers and the community. "So that's what we did," he elaborated. "We built up relationships. And we just did a great job and stayed right in Williamsburg and offered great service. We were there right when the event would start to make sure everything was good. If the weather was bad we made sure we showed up with side-walls and also we gave a lot of stuff for charitable events."

Steve invested his time, resources and dollars in in-kind donations to the community and his good work helped to spread the word about his business. Over the last decade, this has been a very successful business formula for him. Much of the reason it has generated positive results is that he has focused on his own community and maintained a high level of quality in his work.

The thought from day one was to stay in town so they could be within 30 or 40 minutes of addressing a concern of a customer. "We do some jobs at the plantations which is about 45 minutes max," Steve said. "We rarely go to Newport News. We don't go to Richmond. We don't go to Hampton or the beach. We just stay in Williamsburg."

With that focus, Steve made himself and his company available to organizations in need and he got to know the people he did business with.



Word of mouth has been a large part of his business growth. His plan to seek out jobs close to home where he could best serve his customers worked well.

"It's very easy to lose your reputation in town if you do something poorly," Steve said. "It doesn't take many jobs that don't look great before people start talking. If you are trying to just stay in one community, as far as I'm concerned, then you have to be very,

very careful to keep that reputation really high because word travels fast. As long as that word is positive that's great, and it is right now for us."

That strategy has worked out well for Steve. Putting his employees to work at home has kept his business strong. "And now we do a lot of work for the college," Steve continued. "We also do nearly all of Colonial Williamsburg's work. That's about 30% of our business and the rest is all pri-

vate weddings and corporate events."

Just as important as serving his Williamsburg area customers well is his willingness to do work for non-profit organi-

zations that just cover his costs or to become even more involved in certain fund raisers like March of Dimes, Land Conservancy or Relay for Life.

Three years ago, Steve and his wife, Laura, started a non-profit organization called *Inclu-*

sions to create ways to raise money for the charitable organization. *Inclusion's* mission is to inform, involve, and inspire children from diverse backgrounds in the Historic Triangle Community.

"We do the concert series that was at NewTown for the last three years and now it's at Lake Matoaka on the college campus," Steve explained. "So we do that and we do the Chocolate Affair which is in February. It's just a big chocolate indulgence.

We have about 15 or 18 vendors who donate 500 items of chocolate. We charge \$15 a ticket to get in and then you eat all the chocolate you want to eat for about three hours. We're in about our fourth or fifth year." All proceeds from both events go to *Inclusions*.

"And then we give it back to kids organizations in town or individuals," Steve added. "Whatever the needs are. We've given probably \$30,000 to \$40,000 back to the community over the last three to four years doing that. That's separate from Williamsburg Event Rentals where we help out with lots of events."

While Steve is happy about receiving the Chamber of Commerce award, he recognizes that his success and personal fulfillment doesn't come from honors such as this, but from the work he does. In fact, it is his work that has helped shape his life - not only the work for his business, but his work for family, friends and community. "We've been doing it for over ten years," Steve said. "And I'm still out there working hard doing it." ■

"We worked hard," Steve said. "And we offered great services in the community."

Look for these upcoming issues of *Next Door Neighbors*

SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Education

In Home Date: August 23, 2007
Advertising Deadline: Tuesday, August 7th

OCTOBER ISSUE

Family Values

In Home Date: September 20, 2007
Advertising Deadline: Tuesday, September 4th

NOVEMBER ISSUE

Health

In Home Date: October 18, 2007
Advertising Deadline: Tuesday, October 2nd

DECEMBER ISSUE

Williamsburg Holidays

In Home Date: November 15, 2007
Advertising Deadline: Tuesday, October 30th

JANUARY ISSUE

2008 Forecast

In Home Date: December 13, 2007

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Want to Nominate Someone?

2008

Small Business Person of the Year

To submit your nomination, simply take a few minutes to complete the form you can find online at:

www.williamsburgcc.com

The following criteria should be your guide in submitting your nomination:

Staying Power

A substantiated history as an established business; must be in business at least five years

Growth in Number of Employees

A benchmark to judge the impact of the business on the job market

Increase in Sales and/or of Unit Volume

An indication of continued growth

Innovativeness of Product or Service Offered

Illustrations of the creativity and imagination of the nominee

Response to Adversity

Examples of problems faced in the business and the methods used to solve them

Evidence of Contributions by the Nominee to Aid Community Oriented Projects

Using personal time and/or other resources

The deadline for nominations is August 15, 2007

Nominations may be faxed to (757) 229-2047

or mail to

Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance
Small Business Person Nomination
PO Box 3495
Williamsburg, VA 23187-3495

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Kitchen Tune-Up

Mark Levy, Owner

Mark Levy opened the Williamsburg branch of this remodeling service just two years ago. He has built his business on two things he knows best – customer service and wood. Kitchen Tune-Up is a National Franchise System started in 1989 specializing in cabinet refacing, new kitchen cabinets, restoration and reconditioning of any wood in your home.



Mark Levy owns Kitchen Tune-Up.

Q: Mark, can you tell us a little about Kitchen Tune-Up?

A: We are a kitchen and bath remodeling service. We offer an entry-level remodel, where we come in and breathe new life into old kitchen cabinets or bathroom vanities. We offer refacing, which gives kitchens a brand-new look without the brand new cost. And we offer new kitchens – countertops, cabinets and floors - for the average budget. That's who we are in the kitchen business.

Q: Why did you get into this remodeling business?

A: Only about 10 percent of people can say "I can afford to get a new kitchen." There's 90 percent who say "I wish I could get a new kitchen." I got into this business for these people. Previously I was in the customer service business for 25 years. My father built dollhouses and museum-quality dollhouse furniture when I was growing up. So wood-

working is something I also know well.

Q: What kind of changes have you seen in your business in the last two years?

A: We have definitely grown as the word has gotten out about what we do. We have a great referral business, which means people like what we do. They realize we are a reasonably priced alternative to new kitchens.

Q: Are there any challenges your business currently faces?

A: Project management is very challenging. Home improvements are stressful for homeowners. There are a lot of horror stories out there about remodels.

As a contractor, keeping communication open helps them get through the process easily. We strive to make the client comfortable with the process. It helps if we all keep an open mind.

Q: What kind of opportunities do you see in Williamsburg?

A: Every market has opportunities. In Williamsburg there are certain things you cannot do because of the historical aspect. Also, the housing market is not allowing many people to buy houses with brand-new kitchens. We can help give these old kitchens tasteful face-lifts.

Q: What do you like best about what you do?

A: Watching the process. Seeing an awful kitchen go to "Oh my goodness, that's beautiful!"



Carol Copenhauer,
Williamsburg

A. "I would want to start a business where I could help people more. There are so many people who need help and I would want to create a business that could do more to meet their needs."

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Q. **If you had the financial means, the capabilities and the resources to start any small business you wanted, what would it be and why?**



Garrett Petit,
Williamsburg

A. "I'd probably want to build something that would be teenage oriented so that way we'd actually have something for teenagers to do so they wouldn't get arrested for loitering around. Everyone's going to say we've got the WISC complex and how they sometimes do their Friday night dances, but they stopped doing that my sophomore year. So what I would open would be a place where high school kids could go and hang out. It would have a lounge, have dance floors, have an arcade place where those kids could go. Just some place where teenagers can actually just hang out and not be questioned about where they are going or what they are doing."

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Next Door Neighbors is now providing space each month for you to keep each other informed about things that are happening in Williamsburg, and how you feel about them.

If you have an event or happening you want your neighbors to know about, or you have an opinion about something of general interest, let us know. We will publish as many submissions as possible in each upcoming issue of *Next Door Neighbors*. You must email us your full name and provide us with a

telephone number in case we need clarification. Submissions will not be printed without full names of the person submitting the information.

To have your email published in the next issue of *Next Door Neighbors*, send us your opinion on matters you want to share with your neighbors, or give us information on upcoming events occurring between August 24th and September 20th.

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