

# WESTCHESTER COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

ALL ABOUT BUSINESS IN NEW YORK'S GOLDEN APPLE

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## Taking the plunge

### *Entrepreneurs need focus and passion to succeed*

By PIP KLEIN

Starting or expanding a small business in today's changing economy is a little bit like a real-world episode of "Survivor." It requires taking risks, being brave and having more than just luck. But according to some entrepreneurs, the most important ingredient is a decided love for the business at hand.

"The first thing you must have is a passion for whatever it is that you're doing," says Michael LaSala, chairman of business administration, management and marketing at The College of Westchester (formerly the Westchester Business Institute) in White Plains. "If you don't have a passion for it, you probably won't be successful at it. The other thing is you have to have a really good idea and either a product or service that people want. You have to have something that the world wants and they'll come find you."

LaSala, a 23-year Westchester resident, sets an example for his own students. He turned to teaching four years ago after several decades in corporate sales and production. He finds it interesting that his grandfather had worked for the same company for his whole life and his father was with the same company for more than 30 years.

"People don't do that anymore. They are not expected to," explains LaSala. "The reality is we all have learned to be more flexible in the marketplace. Large companies continue to eliminate those positions that they no longer need. Many people have also found that one way to be very successful and to make yourself easily promotable is to start your own busi-

ness. I start a business today — I can be president tomorrow."

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), Americans have been very active starting those businesses. America's 22.4 million small businesses employ more than 51 percent of the private work force and generate more than 52 percent of the nation's gross domestic product. And, financing those businesses has become a key part of every plan.

Frank Morina is a senior vice president at Union State Bank, who deals with small businesses and manages all the bank's branches, including the eight in Westchester. He feels that small businesses need more than just backing from their bank — they need to be able to communicate with them as well.

Union State, like many area banks, works with the SBA helping to get small businesses the loans they need to get started.

Several other programs are geared toward helping the prospective small-business owner. The Women's Enterprise Development Center (WEDC) in White Plains is one. A new federal grant will be funding the center with \$150,000 a year for the next five years.

"That grant puts us on the map for women entrepreneurs here in Westchester County and the lower Hudson Valley," says Anne M. Janiak, WEDC executive director. "We're growing and we want to help start-up and existing businesses."

Some of the businesses that Janiak sees have been things like floral design, catering, child care and graphics.

"Micro entrepreneurs are women who may not want to give up their full-time



**M. Grace Cantwell**  
President of Metronome Marketing

jobs," explains Janiak. "They just want to grow their income on the side. It's not only good for the family, it's good for the community. Our goal is to help women achieve economic self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship."

Grace Cantwell, a new member of The Business Council of Westchester, started her own business, Metronome Marketing, in October.

Her Tarrytown company, which produces print and Web materials, began as an outgrowth of her previous marketing communications position with Clarfeld Financial Advisors. When she decided to set out on her own, the company became her first customer.

Cantwell, a Dobbs Ferry native, had built a strong network over the years. She attended Iona College and then spent 20 years working in various industries.

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# Taking the plunge —

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"I'm loving having a business," says Cantwell. "I'm so excited I did it and my timing was fabulous."

SCORE — the Service Corps of Retired Executives — is a SBA affiliate that serves as "counselors to America's small business." With more than 58 advisers, including 12 women, the group offers one-on-one counseling, mentoring and free workshops.

"Many people who come to SCORE spend more time planning a two-week vacation than they do starting a life-changing event like starting a business," says Bob D'Agostino, the assistant district director for the New York and New Jersey SCORE chapters and immediate past president of the Westchester chapter.

Jerry Gutterman, current co-chairman of the Westchester chapter, agrees. "Your job is how to best serve your customers and make them come back," explains Gutterman. "In business, we talk about three things: price, quality and service. If you can be outstanding in just two of those areas, chances are you are going to succeed."

Gutterman, former chief financial officer of Sequa Corp. in New York City, spent seven years with the American Management Association.

"We help people develop a business plan to know where they are going," says Gutterman. "And if it is a business already in business, we feel they should focus on their market and what are they doing to differentiate themselves from the competition."

William Battalia is the other co-chairman of the Westchester SCORE chapter.

"My advice would be different depending on they type of business I was talking to," says Battalia, who had run Battalia Winston International, a New York City executive search firm with international affiliate offices. "Many people going into business have no idea what they are doing. We make them realize that it takes a lot of thinking, researching and reading before you take the first step."

For every new business, finding that special niche is important. Even though restaurants tend to have a high failure rate, White Plains native Peter Herrero Jr. has created a successful venture, Sam's of Gedney Way.

"We used to be slow in the summer, so

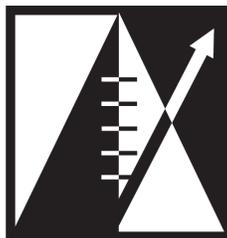


Anne M. Janiak, the Women's Enterprise Development Center (WEDC) director, says WEDC is growing and prepared to help start-up and existing businesses.

we developed The Great American BBQ and Picnic Co.," explains Herrero, who has spun the original company he bought 17 years ago into several separate enterprises, including First Class Catering. "Now,

we're busy in the summer."

His advice for small business owners is to focus on their skills as managers, to motivate their staff and improve their marketing.



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## Metronome Marketing

560 White Plains Road, Tarrytown NY 10591  
(914) 332-1600 • Fax (914) 332-1663  
[www.MetronomeMarketing.com](http://www.MetronomeMarketing.com)