

Small businesses grow despite slow economy

Eugene is home to various programs and resources designed to assist small businesses in succeeding

By Caron Alarab
News Reporter

As the owner of a small business, University accounting graduate Kevin Cohen has mixed feelings about the advantages of starting out in the Eugene market.

"I think it's a very difficult market to start a business in," Cohen said. "But for lifestyle reasons, it's a great place to be."

After opening Bene Gourmet Pizza with his wife Erika in 2000, Cohen said his business has grown to accommodate 33 current employees at three different locations: 4 Oakway Center, 225 W. Broadway and 2566 Willamette St.

Although he admits the dwindling economy made times tough the first few years, Cohen said the premier pizza market has treated him well.

With his heart set on goals of developing a strong regional brand in the Northwest and improving livable wages and health care benefits for employees, Cohen said Bene Gourmet Pizza will continue to flourish locally.

"We've taken very little of our profits out of the business because it goes toward expansion and development," he said. "Essentially, I want the business to grow with my team."

Cohen's company is one of many small businesses in Eugene that is aiming to succeed despite the national economic slowdown.

According to the United States Small Business

Administration, small businesses are responsible for 80 percent of net new jobs and represent 96 percent of all exporters of goods. Characterized by an employee base of 500 or less, small businesses also employ more than 56 percent of Oregon's private workforce, which accounts for 754,209 of the 1,332,403 workers in the state.

Although businesses like Bene Gourmet Pizza had rough starts in the Eugene economy, local employees say the region's quality of life keeps them going while owners say business is doing better.

"We're growing, so business just keeps picking up," said Joshua Proudfoot, principal owner of Good Company, a local research and consulting firm.

Located at 435 Lincoln St., the three-year-old business helps government agencies, corporations and institutions of higher education identify and utilize systems and products that are sustainable and better for the environment. In 2001, the Oregon University System recognized the "green" efforts of the company with a Business Alliances group grant to help foster sustainable development for Oregon's colleges and universities.

According to its Web site, www.goodcompany.com, the company currently employs five representatives, and Proudfoot said he hopes to add to that number soon.

"We've made a conscious decision to grow more as a company before we try to get rich," he said. "Our goal for the next few years is to have most of our Northwest and some national and international clients closer to sustainability, and I think we will achieve that."

In an effort to help businesses like Good Company expand into global markets, the Eugene Area

Chamber of Commerce offers various programs and resources to local firms listed on its Web site at www.eugenechamber.com.

Chris Nystrom, head of the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce international program, said the Chamber places emphasis on small business assistance because 1,000 of its 1,200 current members are businesses with 50 employees or less.

"Small businesses go out of business every day," she said. "We provide many services to help those businesses be successful instead."

As part of her position, Nystrom organizes international roundtable discussions for small businesses considering expansion into the global market.

"They're very willing to help us do what we need to succeed as an international business," said Val Hoyle, international sales manager for Burley, a wholesale manufacturer of bicycles, bicycle trailers and rain gear.

The worker-owned co-op has been doing international business for more than 13 years and distributes to more than 3,000 retailers in the U.S., four of which are located in Eugene, according to the company Web site, www.burley.com. After starting out with fewer than six employees, Hoyle said the 25-year-old "big-small business" now has 85 worker-owners with no current plans for expansion.

"We've been doing well, but the economy has affected sales in the whole industry," she said. "However, our prices are decreasing overseas because the value of the dollar has gone down, which is good for us."

Hoyle said Eugene is "excellent" for growing a business because of the highly educated workforce, loyal, supportive consumers and



Tim Bobosky Photographer

Bene Gourmet Pizza co-founder Kevin Cohen works the lunch rush at the 4 Oakway Center restaurant.

attractive neighborhoods.

"For a cycling company, you really couldn't find a better place," Hoyle said. "We wouldn't choose to be anywhere else."

Contact the business/science/technology reporter at caronalarab@dailymerald.com.

NEWS BRIEF

Ellerbe Becket to help plan new basketball arena

University officials announced at Thursday's Athletic Department Finance Committee meeting that Ellerbe Becket, the architectural firm that designed Autzen Stadium, was contracted by the University on Sunday to help plan the new basketball arena. Previously, HKS was con-

tracted for the project.

With new architects and a contractor on board, the project has "reached critical mass," Associate Athletic Director Steve McBride said.

McBride said three ADFC members had met with HKS representatives over the summer to develop a "project document" for the arena, which describes all spaces in the facility and its relationship to surrounding spaces. Ellerbe Becket will continue to work with the same document.

Vice President for Administration Dan Williams' office is currently overseeing most of the planning, although student government feedback will be solicited later.

The ADFC also discussed ticket discrepancies at the Oct. 25 football game against Stanford. Stadium workers collected approximately 4,000 student tickets, although newly elected ADFC chairman Kevin Day estimates nearly 6,000 students were present.

McBride said ticket discrepancies are a recur-

ring problem and may be due to ticket printing technology or tickets lost after collection. He added that the Athletics Department has considered installing turnstiles or bar code scanners at Autzen, but these technologies are cost-prohibitive. The ADFC will continue to discuss possible solutions to this problem.

The group also ratified this year's University Student Ticket Agreement. Only minor wording changes were made.

— Parker Howell

RAMADAN

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at the University Counseling and Testing Center, said giving to others during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and is like getting extra hugs from Allah. The other four pillars are declaring that Allah is the only god, praying five times per day, fasting during Ramadan and making the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Year-round, Muslims are called upon to pray at a nearby mosque, with men going five times a day and women going when possible. Dur-

ing the holy month they also have evening group prayers, called Tarawih.

MSA members pray at the Abubakr Islamic Center in Eugene.

There is a set of prayers Muslims are supposed to recite, Hutchinson said, but at the end of the prayer they can also speak to Allah from their own heart.

Pala estimated there are probably around 50 Muslims at the University.

"I think there's a great number of Muslims here," he said. "Especially compared to the population."

Hutchinson added that it's difficult to tell

exactly how many there are because college students live very nomadic lives. She said that when Muslim students get together she always meets somebody new.

MSA will be meeting every Thursday evening until Ramadan ends on Nov. 24, when Muslims will break their fasts and pray together. The month is a very important time for Muslims around the world, Pala explained, adding that it's their most blessed month.

"Heaven's doors are open for prayer much more than usual," he said.

Contact the people/culture/faith reporter at jaredpaben@dailymerald.com.

CAMPUS BUZZ

Tuesday

UO Cultural Forum Ramadan exhibit, 7:30 a.m.-11:30 p.m. (weekdays) and 10:30 a.m.-11:30 p.m. (Saturday and Sunday), EMU International Lounge. Exhibit will appear Nov. 3 through Nov. 28. For more information, contact the Cultural Forum at 346-4373.

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The Consulate-General of Japan in Portland, Oregon will be at University of Oregon for an informational orientation on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program on the following day:

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