

# FROM WORKER BEE TO ENTREPRENEUR

By A. Manuel

When the economy tanked a few years ago, many employees were sent home with a box of their belongings and a pink slip. And with unemployment still high many local residents have opted to start up their own businesses instead of waiting to find employment. According to Vincent McCoy, executive director of the Inland Empire Small Business Development Center (IESBDC), 740 new businesses were created in the Inland Empire during 2011. This puts the number of new businesses back on par with 2009's figures, McCoy said.

**The IESBDC has seen a wide range of people who are interested in starting their own businesses. Some of the recently created IE businesses include a pizzeria, a chiropractor's office, hair care salons, fitness training and fire protection services, according to McCoy.**

A *Wall Street Journal* article by Emily Malby reported on a recent poll that found that 15 percent of business owners started their companies because they were laid off. Malby writes, "The study supports other research showing that entrepreneurial activity accelerates during times of economic adversity, when much of the unemployed workforce is exploring money-making options. The Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity, for instance, shows that new business creation in 2009 jumped to the highest rate in 14 years with about 340 out of 100,000 adults starting a business each month."

Inland Empire resident Elizabeth Venturini was forced to create her own job when she was laid off after 18 years working for a Fortune 500 company. Venturini thought that with her education and experience she would not have trouble finding work, but she received a rude awakening after she was still jobless several months later. "For several months I did everything 'they' said I should do in a job hunt, but I just could not land a position," Venturini said.

She decided to take a step back from the job hunting grind, and reevaluate her career choice. Venturini said she realized that she had veered away from where her real skills and talents lay.



Elizabeth Venturini

"I analyzed all of this information and realized I was no longer in personal alignment with my former career path. My professional requirements and expectations at this point in my life were different than they were in my 20s," Venturini said.

"After I evaluated all of my skills and talents I matched them to different jobs," Venturini said. "A couple of jobs and key words kept surfacing - education, college, careers and counseling. Then I remembered when I was in college how much I liked going to the campus career center. I wanted to learn about what made up a job, the requirements, skills and education one needed to be successful. So I went on the Internet and looked for jobs and training that matched my interests."

Venturini enrolled in UCLA's College Counseling program and finished the course in a year with a 4.0 grade point average. Venturini later formed Scholasticus, a company that helps prepares students for the college admission process.

She said her experiences, having to find out where her talents lay and retrain for another career later in life, are useful when she is talking to parents.

"When I tell parents my story I ask them if they have gone through something similar. I ask what if someone had asked them when they were in high school what they would like to do. Would their college major have been different? What about their career path? Would they have been happier and more successful?" Venturini said. "Their teenager is probably thinking the same things! Parents really relate to this story. That's when I knew I was finally on the right career path and started my own college career practice focusing on career development."

While running her own company comes with new challenges, such as taking on the financial burden of a business, and being responsible for the marketing and branding of the company, Venturini says there are many rewards. She does a job she loves, and she gets to set her own hours. There is also the personal satisfaction of doing a job where she knows she is helping people.

"It is very fulfilling for me to finally be able to use everything I learned in business and through my education in a way that helps families," Venturini said. "College career counseling is second nature to me and it shows when I work with families."

As someone who studies the career field, Venturini says the changing nature of the market is forcing more people into entrepreneurship. The American workforce has changed to the point that most workers don't expect to be employed at one company for the duration of their professional life. "The jobs that my generation, baby boomers, were educated for and their skills sets that were so highly valued are quickly disappearing or already gone," Venturini said. "I believe people must be able determine what they are good at doing, learn how to promote themselves and create their own economic future."

However starting your own business comes with its own set of challenges. Often new entrepreneurs find themselves looking for guidance. Upland resident Joe Nicassio said he



has many of these forced entrepreneurs as his clients. Nicassio is a life coach for entrepreneurs and the author of a soon to be released book, titled "Resurrecting America's Entrepreneurial Spirit."

Nicassio understands the challenges of forced entrepreneurs because he is one of them. Nicassio used to work in the technology field several years ago, but after being laid off decided to put his skills to use in the sales and marketing field. "I used to trouble shoot electronics, now I troubleshoot businesses," he said.

As a frequent speaker to business schools and graduating classes of master's degree students, Nicassio says he sees that many people would like to start their own businesses, but they are often crippled with fear.

"People are petrified of the unknown," Nicassio said. He added that people are also scared of failure, but every entrepreneur has to fail several times before their business succeeds.

"In order to succeed in any business, you have to fail and people are afraid to fail," Nicassio said. "If you want to succeed, you have to go through trials."

According to Nicassio, all children are born as natural geniuses, but they are conditioned into mediocrity. He cites the way children know they can get their mothers to buy them candy, if they ask them several times. But, a few years later when the same children have to sell candy to raise money for school functions, they get discouraged after they hear a few nos. "People have a fear of selling," Nicassio said. "They are convinced selling sucks."

Nicassio said the biggest challenge that entrepreneurs face is criticism from friends and family, who urge them to get a job. Being an entrepreneur means that people are forced to take control of their own destiny and environment, which you can't do when you are working for someone else, according to Nicassio. Both Nicassio and Venturini show that many



Joe Nicassio

Americans are choosing to go the entrepreneurship route and take control of their economic destiny.

New business owners have several resources they can turn to for assistance such as chambers of commerce and agencies like the IESBDC.

The IESBDC helps new businesses create business and marketing plans. However, McCoy said the no. 1 request is for assistance with financing.

"We are not a lender, but we will walk you through the loan process," McCoy said. This includes looking at an entrepreneur's personal and business finances, reviewing their credit and helping them organize financial projections, which are needed for loan applications.

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