

Picking up on trucks

It used to be that only people like farmers and construction workers would pick up on trucks. But these days more and more consumers are going for these hardy, heavy-duty vehicles. For a look at the boom in truck sales, turn to Page 5D.

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Minding their own business

Sisters live dreams as entrepreneurs

Setting off on your own to start a new business can be a scary prospect. But working for yourself also has advantages and satisfactions no 9-to-5 job can touch. This week Street Scene looks at four young people who took the plunge and went into business for themselves.

By M.B. Dillon
staff writer

This is the tale of two sisters who turned their lives around one day while sitting at their dad's kitchen table.

From the time they were kids in Redford Township, Michele and Dianne Nicola figured adulthood would find them married, raising a family and working part time in dentistry.

Before they were old enough to date, the sisters were working in their dad's dentist's office. They noticed that dental hygienists earned good money and just about scheduled their own hours.

A couple of years apart in the late 1970s, the Nicolas graduated from Ferris State University in hygiene.

ON THE JOB, they discovered why dentistry ranks among the most stressful of all occupations.

"Dentistry has the highest suicide rate of any profession, and it ranks among the highest in drug addiction, alcoholism and divorce," said Michele, now a Farmington Hills resident.

"Hygiene was very good to me while I was in it. But it's so myopic. Everything is totally focused. And no one really wants to go to the dentist. No matter how hard you try, many people still will not feel at ease. You start getting sick of that atmosphere."

"I remember the day we decided to change," said Michele. "I had the day off, and Dianne had the day off. We were sitting at my dad's kitchen table in August 1985."

"I remember saying, 'Dianne, we have to do something because we are both hygienists. We can't go through life like this.'"

They decided they would "have to make a mark and do something with our lives besides going to work every day."

"We wanted to make a difference."

'It's hard. Sometimes I go home and cry. I want it yesterday.'

— Michele Nicola on owning her own business

WHEN SHE had lived in San Diego a few years earlier, Dianne had fallen in love with exercise and aerobics. She earned a second degree in anatomy and physiology and studied at Jane Fonda's Workout company in Los Angeles.

Teaching in a health club, Nicola realized she'd happened upon something. "You were still helping people, but people who were real receptive to what you were offering. You weren't telling them they had gum disease, or how to brush their teeth."

Michele also lived in California in the 1970s. Hygiene paid the bills, but Nicola spent lots of her free time hosting parties for friends and business associates. She was so good at it others began asking her to plan parties.

"It spread by word of mouth, and pretty soon I did more party planning than dentistry," she said.

BOTH RETURNED to Michigan in 1980 for family reasons.

"I was doing dentistry again," but in organizing family weddings, graduations and parties, "people started seeing my talent," said Michele. "People would ask me for help, and it started snowballing all over again."

Dianne went back to hygiene, and on the side, taught aerobics and exercise classes for Livonia public schools and a Farmington Hills health spa.

"I was always taught: Stay with what you know," added Michele, who had branched out from hygiene to work as an independent contractor for a dental consultant and broker.

"Having seen a lot of illness and death from the time I was little, I realized how short life is. I wanted to bring happiness into people's lives, help them share some of the happy times instead of the yucky times."

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DILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Dianne Nicola gave up a career in dental hygiene to start her own firm, Exec-u-fit Exercise Co., which brings workouts to the work place.



DILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Like her sister, Michele Nicola left the dental field to open up her own business. Every day is a party for her as she owns and operates the Party Specialists in Livonia.

Consultant has program for success

By Joan K. Dietch
special writer

"You will get somewhere faster if you work for yourself," Bob Mick emphatically states.

Mick, the owner of Digital Methods Inc. in Auburn Hills, received a master's degree in computer science from Oakland University in 1984 and is a self-employed program analyst.

"Computer programming consulting is convenient: no overhead, use of clients' equipment and offices, very little risk and capital needed," Mick said. One of the essentials in success of any kind is luck, and it was there for Mick. A friend of his had gone after a computer consulting job with General Motors, but didn't have the right combination of skills. The friend suggested Mick try it. He followed through on the suggestion and landed the contract.

ALL OF MICK'S contracts have been long-term — three to five years. He has no job security concerns as each contact has led to another.

"You have to have the right disposition to be self-employed: a positive attitude and confidence in yourself, knowing you can get work if you have to."

Mick has enough confidence in the future to take on building a 2,500-square-foot house on 2 1/2 acres in Rochester. He and his wife, Laurie, and their 3-year-old son Chris hope to move into the house by next spring.

The advantages of more money and choice of projects while self-employed outweigh the negatives: long hours and endless paperwork, Mick said. Several of his friends have tried contracting but all eventually went to corporations, preferring long-range security and "no hassles."

Bob Mick projects a quiet, confident image, in touch with who he is, comfortable in his recreational pursuits as well as his work. Downhill skiing and flying are his choices for fun when he has the time.

Temporary firm provides lasting rewards

By Joan K. Dietch
special writer

Waitressing while in high school and college paid off in the long run for Shiela Ryan.

"Those experiences taught me a lot about people," Ryan, 24, said. "I found I loved dealing with the public, and I enjoy working."

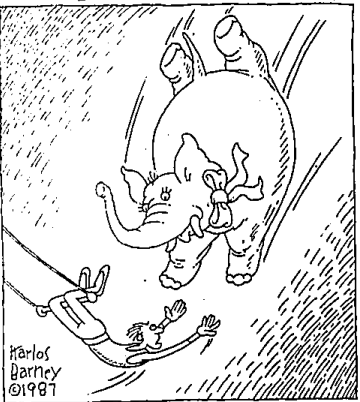
Ryan combined her talent for dealing with the public and love of work by starting her own business, Smelling Temporarys, in Southfield. That same positive attitude that made Ryan a successful waitress has kept her business off the ground for its first year.

In addition to enthusiasm and business know-how, Ryan needed a good chunk of capital. She got the \$100,000 required from multiple loans and a family member who wanted to invest.

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R. U. Syrius

Karlos Barney



The Flying Zambinis surprise their brother Tony with a new twist.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Computer programming consultant Bob Mick, the owner of Digital Methods Inc. in Auburn Hills, says a positive attitude and confidence in yourself are musts for the self-employed.