

Deja vu: Family rebuilds 10 years after blaze

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Those who remember Suburban Construction and Glass Works Co. before it burned down 10 years ago might experience some déjà vu when they drive by the old location.

The home improvement services store made a Phoenix-like resurgence from the ashes about a month ago, reopening just two doors east of the original store on Eight Mile, east of Grand River. The original store, named Suburban Aluminum and Glass, was owned by Tony Chrysogelos of Livonia. His children would for dad after school and on weekends.

Ever since the store burned to the ground, Chrysogelos' family, particularly daughter Anna Stefanos of Farmington Hills, never forgot about reopening the business. Last winter, she noticed a building for sale near the old site. Considering the circumstances, she took it as a good sign.

"I avoided driving by there for years," Stefanos said, citing painful memories. "I thought that after all these years that this was as close to getting the original space as we could get."

Anna's father said he was happily surprised by her business venture and is willing to help — if the price is right, he added jokingly.

"I believe they're going to do well," Chrysogelos said.

■ 'I tried all the time to be fair. You've got to be treating people good and honestly.'

Tony Chrysogelos
—Owner

Stefanos, who works as an engineer during the day, tends to the business' administrative duties during her off hours, which combined with her full time job, add up to about 60 weekly.

"It takes a lot out of you," Stefanos said. "But to me, it's very much worth it."

Several of the business' former customers have returned, and business is picking up. And with spring, a prime home improvement time, only months away, they hope sales will continue to rise. Five people are on staff and there are about 20-25 additional people who do the installations at the job sites.

Like father, like daughter

Chrysogelos came to Livonia from Greece in 1970 as a 22-year-old to work toward what he considered the American dream — owning his own business. That dream was realized in 1977, when he opened his business.

But in November, 1988 he missed a fire insurance payment and an employee playing with matches set the building ablaze

with everyone in it. Fortunately, no one was hurt. But without insurance money to fall back on, the business' future was in ashes.

Following the fire, Chrysogelos began working as a machinist for a Southfield manufacturer. He hopes to retire next year.

The golden rule

Running his own business taught him a few things about customer relations — and about treating people the way he wanted to be treated.

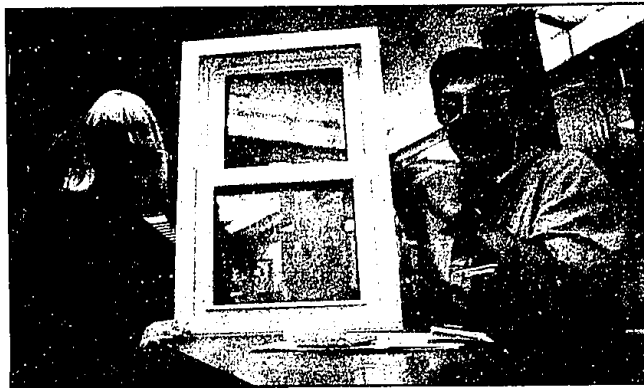
"I tried all the time to be fair," Chrysogelos said of his customer service philosophy. "You've got to be treating people good and honestly."

Some big name customers at Suburban included news anchor Bill Bonds, Detroit politician Sharon McPhail, boxer Tommy Hearns and radio newscaster Dick Purtan. But customers with famous names were treated the same as those with not so famous ones.

"That's not what impressed me," Chrysogelos said. "I'm never impressed by a name."

Undaunted

Over the past 10 years, competition has increased in the home improvement business. Home Depot stores seemingly sprouted up overnight, and competing chains like HQ and Builders Square have gone out of business.



New: Anna Stefanos and Tony Chrysogelos sell replacement windows of all styles from their new business location.

ness. But the competition from Home Depot and Lowe's doesn't scare Chrysogelos or his children.

"More companies have been destroyed because of Home Depot," Chrysogelos said. But

because Suburban both sells and installs home improvement supplies like glass, doors and siding, they fill a different niche than most home improvement businesses.

"I like the competition anyway," Chrysogelos said.

Suburban Construction and Glass Works Co. is at 27434 W. Eight Mile, east of Grand River. Hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday. The phone number is (248) 426-6820.

No need to fear, millennium bug not likely to bite Hills services

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills' Central Services Department has been taking steps to ensure that Jan. 1, 2000 will be just another day and not the chaos-filled day envisioned by those fearing the "millennium bug."

City-provided services, such as snow plowing, are expected to run smoothly. Farmington Hills' snow plow equipment does not contain any microchips that could go haywire when the year changes from 1999 to 2000, said Michael Lasley, Central Services director. Some other cities have microchip technology designed to perform self-diagnostic functions to help pinpoint engine problems.

"We've verified that we don't have computer chip technology" in snow plow equipment, Lasley said.

Keeping the snow plows fired up shouldn't be a problem, either. The gasoline pumps run manually rather than electronically.

"(Trucks will) be filled to the

brim and ready to go for that event," Lasley said, referring to a possible snowstorm. In early January 1999, a massive snowstorm hit southeast Michigan, closing schools, clogging roads and taking snow-removal crews on holiday break by surprise.

If things do go wrong when the year 2000 arrives, the city has contingency plans. A skeleton crew of city workers will be at city hall Jan. 1, 2000. If needed, an emergency operations center will be set up at fire stations to aid people who lose power and need to keep warm.

But most importantly, as far as residents are concerned, is getting the word out about the city's preparedness for Y2K problems.

"We talk to residents every week," Lasley said. "We have brochures available, and we've tried to be as open in the public as we can. We don't see any reason to panic or to be concerned."

Most residents are worried about senior residents, particularly children worried about older relatives, Lasley said.

"As far as city services go, we

■ If things do go wrong when the year 2000 arrives, the city has contingency plans. A skeleton crew of city workers will be at city hall Jan. 1, 2000.

don't anticipate any problems."

In late 1997, the city formed a Y2K committee. Its duties have included evaluating more than 200 systems with more than 60 percent classified as Y2K ready as of March. City staff has closely monitored the major utility companies regarding their Y2K readiness.

As far as bills go, winter tax bills will be sent in December. They will be due Feb. 14, 2000, eliminating any millennium conflict, said Kathy Dornan, Hills city clerk. Bills for water and sewer are mailed quarterly through Oakland County, not the city.

Water is also not provided through Farmington Hills, but the city has received assurances from the city of Detroit that everything will flow smoothly

Jan. 1, 2000.

"Any failure from that system would be a problem," Lasley said. Detroit's water system is an older one and depends on

gravity, not pumps, to maintain the flow of water.

Will there be problems? "We're hoping not, but I can't give that assurance," Lasley said. The city has received written documentation from all the utility companies stating their commitment to avoiding Y2K problems.

"(Utility companies) have indicated that they're spending money on Y2K concerns."

About two weeks ago, the date

Y2K

9-9-99 hit calendars, causing some to worry millennium bug-like problems would wreak havoc. That day also was a major testing day, Lasley said. Nothing bad happened.

"A lot of utility companies did situational testing," he said. "They have been testing extensively in the past year."

Here are tips for the change

Tips for preparing for the new millennium:

■ Keep paper records of bank balances, credit card balances, investments and all bills.

■ Check with financial and investment companies on their Y2K status.

■ Review investments and contact those companies to review their Y2K compliance efforts. Many have posted their Y2K status on their Web sites.

■ Refill prescriptions and check with your pharmacist about renewal dates that fall early in the year 2000.

■ Review those suppliers that you depend upon so that deliveries and service is not interrupted.

■ Check with your utility as to the best way to avoid damage to appliances (i.e. televisions, computers, etc.) from potential electrical surges.

■ Consider obtaining an

updated credit rating early in 2000 to ensure there have been no changes.

■ If you use oil or propane for heat and your supplier has an automated delivery system, verify your deliveries will not be interrupted by any year 2000 problems.

■ Check security systems to be sure that any software controlling the system is Y2K ready.

■ Check with your personal computer manufacturer regarding any upgrades your system may require. Many may need a simple BIOS (Basic Input Output System) upgrade that is commonly available on company Web sites.

■ Renew vehicle registrations and drivers' licenses in late November to avoid any possible complications.

■ Keep emergency funds available such as travelers checks to avoid any problems that may

exist with ATMs during the first few weeks of 2000.

■ If you plan to travel around the new year, fill up your gas tank early to avoid long lines and check with your airline to be assured there are no problems.

■ It is difficult to predict the likelihood of service interruptions. It is prudent then to plan for the unexpected. Most computer sensitive companies have two week response plans ready. Most families may want to have their own "two week plans" responding to possible disruptions in services we all take for granted.

■ Watch for year 2000 announcements on local television, radio and newspapers for additional information to help prepare for the new year.

Source: Farmington Hills Central Services Department

Board of education awards bids

New cafeteria tables at Dunckel and East, and new drafting furniture were among the purchases approved last week by the Farmington Board of Education.

The \$1.12 million in purchases approved Tuesday are related to the ongoing building renovations at several of the schools. The renovations are part of a \$93 million bond issue approved by voters in August, 1997. McSEV Redford is the consultant/construction management firm handling the renovations.

The cafeteria tables bid was awarded to Krueger & Associates of Bath for \$47,297.

Winning the Computer-Aided Design lab furniture bid was Advanced Technologies of Northville for \$46,925.

A series of bids were awarded for work at Power

Middle School. Among them were:

■ Ahern Contracting of Ray Township, earth/grade work, \$26,400

■ Unity Construction of Burton for concrete footings and foundation, \$66,191

■ Navetta Masonry Contractors of Novi for masonry work, \$250,205

■ Casa Erectors of Livonia, steel work \$112,900

■ AIRTEC Corporation of Detroit, hollow metal, wood doors and hardware, \$35,476

■ Oakland Plumbing Co., plumbing work, \$169,922

■ McMurray Electric Co., electrical work, \$370,398

The total amount of the above Power Middle School bids was \$1,030,892.

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