

By Teri Bence
staff writer

James Karchon, a Southfield businessman, took an engineering firm he admits was "going down the river" and within three months it had procured \$20 million in sales with a projected \$1 million profit for the year.

A native Detroit, Karchon lived on the East Coast for awhile but when it came time to starting a business venture, he came home to Michigan, a place where he felt comfortable.

Despite the four economic climate, Michigan, like the rest of the Midwest, had one important thing going for it — a strong work ethic — he told a gathering of business people in Southfield's Hilton Hotel last week.

"My personal opinion is this is the best place to start a company. We don't get up to smell the salt air, and look to see if the surf's up. We go to work," he said.

AND THAT'S what 150 business people and aspiring entrepreneurs had in mind at last week's Greater Detroit/Southeast Michigan Entrepreneurship Forum, a workshop promoted to "share secrets" about business successes, from dig-in hard-work stories to just plain lucked-out accounts.

Sponsored by the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce and a lengthy list of government groups and Michigan corporations, it is one of the few entrepreneur forums with state funding, collecting \$25,000 for the two-day seminar. In all, 55 business persons, nominated by a forum steering committee, took part as speakers and workshop leaders. Planning encompassed nine months under the coordination of a Columbus, Ohio-based non-profit organization called the Entrepreneurship Institute.

Topics ranged from the "Experiences of Successful Entrepreneurs" to developing workable business plans, finding and keeping good employees, financing new business start-ups, marketing and business promotions and more.

KARCHON, president of Engineering Services Inc., was just one of the so-called business success who shared his secrets for success. Today, his company has offices in Dearborn, Kalamazoo, Florida and overseas in England, but there was a time of uncertainty, he said, when he and three partners first proposed taking over a failing company.

Choosing not to sock venture capital because of the "shackles" of "rules and regulations," they sought out to convince bank officers of their business plan. And therein lay his advice to the audience.

"Don't sell pizzazz, sell conservatism," he said. "He (the loan officer) must know you and believe in

your team. That's how we succeeded without venture capital.

"You must develop a long-term banking relationship and pursue senior bank officers," he told them, adding that junior bank-loan officers may not have the authority and experience needed for all business deals.

Beyond that, the work ethic and imagination are vital ingredients to success, he said.

ANOTHER MEMBER of the three-person panel of business successes was John Barfield, an Ypsilanti business owner who told of his personal "rags to riches" experience. With a 10th-grade education and a philosophy that one works hard for what they get, Barfield sold cleaning products and then worked as a janitor before launching his business career. It started in 1954 when he and his wife began what he called "a little janitorial service." The opportunities abounded as he cashed in on a ready market. The home construction market was booming and his company fit right in, cleaning dusty new subdivision homes to prepare them for ready occupancy.

"I got three months leave from my janitor's job (to start the new business), and I have not worked for anyone else since," he said.

He wrote a book called the "Barfield Method of Building Maintenance," still used by the industry, and opened a janitorial school.

He had national and international companies interested in buying him out. In 1969 he sold his company to worldwide conglomerate ITT. The sale made him a millionaire, and at 39 he retired.

He realized within a short time that he wasn't ready to retire, and so he re-entered the business world. Today, he owns two firms. Bartech, a drafting firm with 500 designers located in Troy and Ann Arbor, as well as outstate in California, Florida and Philadelphia, is considered one of the most successful minority firms in the country. Barfield Manufacturing Co., which produces screws for General Motors vehicles, has \$17 million in sales this year.

THE MANUFACTURING firm was started after General Motors, impressed with Barfield's previous successes, approached him about starting a new venture. He was challenged, launching the company with six employees, a \$100,000 loan and three "old machines." Today there are 100 employees. Since starting the business, Barfield has sold 49 percent of it to General Motors, a move he said leaves him with controlling interest using GM's "status and contacts to grow."

"It's a true relationship, not a front," he said.

And his advice to the audience: "There's nothing worse than not taking advantage of an opportunity. You need confidence in your abilities, but don't take unnecessary risks. Research very carefully."

Keth Crain, president and publisher of Crain Communications Inc., called entrepreneurship "a state of mind. I don't think once you get it, you lose it. But you have to share that excitement with everyone around you."

Above all, he said, business people shouldn't be wrapped up in becoming an entrepreneur, "becoming empowered," but rather in "building a better mousetrap" and working to produce the best product possible.

Then he quoted a favorite line spoken by actor James Garner in the motion picture, "The Wheeler Dealer."

"You've got to remember that you've got to do it because you love it and the profit is just a way to keep score."

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Levin's mother dies in Detroit

Bess Levin, the mother of U.S. Sen. Carl Levin and State Rep. Sander Levin, died last week at age 87.

A Birmingham native, Mrs. Levin moved to Detroit in the early 1930s, becoming the matriarch of one of Michigan's foremost political families.

Mrs. Levin was the widow of Saur R. Levin, a Detroit attorney and former Michigan corrections commissioner who died in 1960. Besides Carl and Sander Levin, she is survived by daughter Hannah

Gladstone, currently community liaison for the Radiation Oncology Center at Detroit's Harper Hospital, and 10 grand children.

Her surviving brother, Hy Levinson, is the former owner of the Detroit radio station WCAR (now WCMJ). Her late brother, David Levinson, was a veteran member of the Oakland County Board of Supervisors from Birmingham. Her late son-in-law, William Gladstone, was a 17th Congressional District Democratic chairman.

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