

Farmington Observer

BUSINESS

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SUBURBAN BUSINESS LEADERS

James T. Biehl has become a partner at the Southfield-based Schmalz & Company, P.C., Certified Public Accountants and Consultants. Biehl is an accounting and audit partner specializing in financial planning, tax planning and business consulting for closely-held businesses.



James T. Biehl

Lynco Hall of Dearborn has been appointed account executive at Kalon, Blitzer and Desmond, Inc. in Troy. Kennedy is responsible for the management of the Hagopian Carpet and Punati Chemical accounts, and will work on special projects for Ziebart Tidy Car.



Lynco Hall

Sandra Knight has been named client service director for Services Marketing Specialists, Inc., a full-service marketing consulting firm in Detroit that provides strategic marketing planning and program implementation for service businesses. She is responsible for public relations counsel to clients in the health care, legal, architecture and engineering professions, and will expand the firm's new business development efforts.



Sandra Knight

Edd Snyder has been named vice president Casey Communications Management, Inc. in Southfield where he will act as a counselor to Casey Communications Management's clients while developing and implementing public relations programs for several key accounts.



Edd Snyder

To submit materials to this column, please send a brief biographical summary along with a black-and-white photo, if possible, to: Business Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. There is no charge.

Aerodata makes unusual evolution

■ Owning a business and nurturing its growth can take some unexpected turns. But rolling with the punches has been a survival tool for one local entrepreneur.

By Doug Funke
STAFF WRITER

Some businesses gradually change focus over time.

Then there are those like Aerodata in Plymouth.

Aerodata was launched in 1976 as an instrumental repair and calibration laboratory by Frank Zuccaro, a Livonia native. The firm now concentrates exclusively on computer sales and services.

"I never cease to be amazed," Zuccaro said of the transformation. "It's been an amazing odyssey, I suppose."

He said he currently employs five and last year had gross sales of \$500,000.

But let's start at the beginning.

Zuccaro learned instrumentation repair while working for Zentop at Willow Run Airport and going to school at the Center for Creative Studies. "My hobby was always art, painting, creative crafts, things like that," he said.

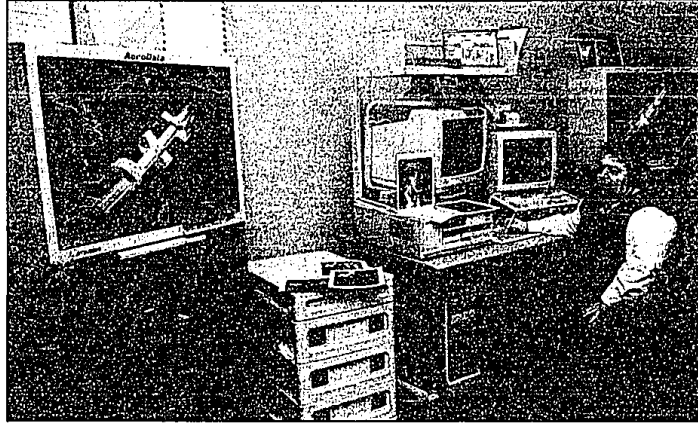
Early on, Zuccaro earned repair certification from the Federal Aviation Administration. That would later become a valuable credential.

Zuccaro followed when Universal Airlines bought Zentop and moved to California, but quickly tired of life on the West Coast and returned home.

He found a job as a technician with Great Lakes Instrument Service. Before long the partners there split up. Because Zuccaro, then 24, had FAA certification needed by the business, the surviving partner made him a partner and even loaned Zuccaro the money for his stake.

Adversity or opportunity?

But things didn't work out in the long run, so Zuccaro decided to go into business for himself, starting Aerodata in 1976.



Business odyssey: Frank Zuccaro, owner of Aerodata, concedes that even he is amazed by his firm's transformation from instrumentation repair to computer services.

An acrimonious legal battle ensued over disposition of assets. Zuccaro and he moved out some of the equipment and set up shop in a rented office one floor above his former digs.

"I started with \$2,000. My big assets were GM, Ford and all of their business," Zuccaro said. "I was editor of a newsletter put out by the Michigan Aircraft Maintenance Association. It was easy for me to pick up business."

Legal peace finally was reached and Zuccaro nurtured the business. He found that he was cyclical and tied to the fortunes of the automotive and air freight industries. Diversification was needed.

"I wanted some computers to do some tracking and bookkeeping," Zuccaro said. "I bought a hobby ma-

chine. We bought some fancy systems and we got inside the machines and found how easy they work. We started fixing computer equipment."

By the early 1980s, the business was divided 50/50 between computer and instrumentation repair, Zuccaro said.

He then looked into software packages, a natural offshoot of computer hardware. In 1989, Aerodata became a dealer for the 3D Studio software package. The product complements computer-aided design drawings to allow for computer visualization and animation.

Zuccaro was like a small kid in a candy store.

"I guess what drew me to graphics was that the computer offered the same capabilities electronically as an

air brush, oil, pastels," he said.

New fork in the road
In December of 1989, Zuccaro received an offer he couldn't refuse to sell the instrumentation repair arm of the business. He used the proceeds to buy computers, screens and tape recorders to demonstrate software capabilities.

"It (3D Studio) really took the industry by storm," he said. "We're one of the top 10 dealers in the nation in terms of sales and support."

Zuccaro moved Aerodata to Plymouth from Belleville nearly two years ago to centrally position the firm for future growth in high-tech areas of Oakland County and Ann Arbor.

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Partnership to spearhead employment opportunities

By DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

USMaintenance Corp. and Jewish Vocational Service are joining hands to train and find jobs for people with developmental disabilities.

"One of our goals is to maximize their potential and help them find employment," according to Linda Remington, Jewish Vocational Service, director of public relations.

Expect to see more and more of these ventures. In July 1992 a federal law requires employers with more than 25 workers to accommodate employees with disabilities.

In this case, JVS will assess skill levels, conduct on-job training and try to find the most appropriate positions at USMaintenance, a janitorial contractor

headquartered in Oak Park.

The company was founded in 1971 by its Chairman Rick Brenner with a \$500 investment while he was a student at Michigan State University.

Today the company has 1,500 employees in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky. They provide services for over 40 million square feet of office space for clients like, AAA, Detroit Edison, EDS, the Galbreath Company, Equitable Life Insurance, General Motors Corporation, IBM and WXYZ-TV.

"We hope this program will become a motivating vehicle for other businesses to employ disabled citizens," according to Mike Mnich, USMaintenance president/chief executive officer who joined the company in 1973 as a part-time janitor to help pay his

way through college. In 1991, after 18 years and 13 positions, Mnich was promoted to his current position.

"I think it could be a real boom to the handicapped sector," Mnich said. "To some people they would normally think it is repetitive or boring. When you're dealing with handicapped people, they're people who haven't been given a chance."

Mnich added that people with developmental disabilities are often ideal employees who come to work early and have good attitudes.

"Nine times out of 10 even if they're sick, they show up for work anyway," he said. "They love what they're doing."

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New mouth guard hits market

By DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

Sheryl Weis Kahn has developed a sports mouth guard that dental experts have endorsed as effective protection.

"We felt the design is very adequate," according to Dr. Christian Stohler, University of Michigan facial pain clinic professor and research scientist.

Weis Kahn generated ideas about how to make the device during the 15 years she has owned Diversified Dental Service Laboratory in Farmington Hills. She spent two years trying and rejecting different prototypes. After investing \$4,000, mostly spent on labor costs, she finally came up with a product she wanted.

"I really just combined data I read in journals and information from doctors' questions," Weis Kahn said.

"There was a lot of trial and error," she said. "I would make one on myself, and I have doctors who have kids who play hockey and they would say this (the earlier

model) isn't quite right."

Athletes have begun to use the Weis Kahn Kinesio Power Guard and she has made sales to the Boston Bruins hockey team, she said.

Weis Kahn claims it increases strength or speed while protecting athletes' teeth, oral tissues, and the temporal mandibular joint. If the joint is contorted it causes pain, soreness, stress and tension in the head and neck area.

"When you're feeling less pain you increase your endurance," she said. "Runners even like to wear it, because they want to increase their endurance."

Stohler stressed that he cannot support the "power" aspect of the guard, because those claims haven't been proven.

But he added that the Weis Kahn Kinesio-Power Guard is a "sophisticated way to protect athletes from injury."

Dr. William L. Godwin, University of Michigan director for Sports Dentistry, said Weis Kahn's guard is "as good as anything on the market." University

of Michigan athletes use a device developed by the university. "Any of the mouth guards work," Godwin said. "Any of the mouth guards protect."

Weis Kahn claims her guard provides at least three times more protection than other mouth guards.

One layer of the guard is dense rubber and vinyl covering the outside of the teeth and gums. The second layer is a tough acrylic.

Athletes had been wearing the standard mouth guard for 40 years, Weis Kahn said, and people complained that they wanted more protection. They say (the standard mouth guard) is not comfortable.

Weis Kahn has been making the guard for two years and has sold it to her friends, dental lab contacts and their families.

Sean Frith, 15, has been wearing the Weis Kahn Kinesio Power Guard for about two months. The Farmington Harrison High

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