

Published: Feb 19, 2008 09:45 PM
Modified: Feb 19, 2008 09:45 PM

Catering to dreams
Many local entrepreneurs have turned ideas into successful small businesses.

Soup or clients.

The homemade soup had to go.

At one point Cary chef Todd Mohr realized that if he wanted to grow his catering business, he needed to spend the hours each day he was preparing homemade soups on making sales calls.

That was just one of the many decisions he has had to make along the rocky road of entrepreneurship.

Now, some six years later, Mohr has moved into a new building and brought wife Heather full time into their business, which has evolved over time and now includes catering and cooking classes.

The Mohrs, owners of Savor Hospitality on West Chatham Street in Cary, are one of the small-business success stories in Cary.

Small businesses have long been the backbone of the American economy.

Who hasn't at one time dreamed of telling the boss to "take that job and" — well, we've all heard that song.

But trading a 9-to-5 career for the keys to the building, say those who have been there, is a lot of work. More like 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. or longer.

For those who are motivated to follow their passion or to be their own boss, there are lots of local resources available, and many of them are free.

Need a business plan? Help with marketing? Financing? Wake Technical Community College offers free counseling for potential small-business owners as well as myriad other resources including free seminars.



Heather and Todd Mohr

Story Tools

-  [Printer Friendly](#)
-  [Email to a Friend](#)
-  [Enlarge Font](#)
-  [Decrease Font](#)
-  [del.icio.us](#)
-  [Digg it](#)

More Front

- [Cary road work alert](#)
- [Man charged with making fake money](#)
- [Net worthy](#)
- [Meeting up online](#)
- [After 40 years, jewelers say customers are the real gems](#)
- [Cary road work alert](#)
- [Man charged with making fake money](#)
- [Net worthy](#)

Advertisements

[Public Storage](#)

Official Site - \$1 for First Month. 2000 Locations.
Instant Quotes.
www.PublicStorage.com

[Travis Sasser, Bankruptcy Attorney](#)

Bankruptcy attorney in Cary, North Carolina.
www.carybankruptcy.com

[Cary T-Shirts](#)

Buy Cary Tees, Hoodies, Polos & Sweatshirts.
1000+ Designs.
CafePress.com

Corporate consultant Kathy Sturgis happened upon the Wake Tech Small Business Center through a friend's advice.

Now, a decade later, she continues to balance her family life with a thriving home-based Cary consulting business, Capital Consulting Group (capconsulting group.com).

Sturgis, who has a doctorate in organizational communications, taught at the university level for years. Through both work and the classroom she had developed many skills in planning and communications.

Sturgis said one of the most important things Ken Dillo, director of the Small Business Center, did was help her define what she could offer to clients.

Her "elevator speech:" "I help businesses grow. ... I'm a process expert. Communications and planning are my areas of expertise," she said.

She helps businesses of all kinds to solve problems of all kinds, from employee communication problems to goal setting and helping companies work through special projects.

Sturgis said the Small Business Center continues to be a valuable professional connection.

"I feel like they are rooting for me," she said.

Dillo meets personally with each person who comes through the Small Business Center's doors in Cary seeking help to start a business.

Dillo says the concept behind the free resources offered through the center is simple: "I want to educate you. At the end of the day my job is economic development. If we can add jobs (to the economy), I've done my job."

Path to independence

"There are plenty of people with ideas," Mohr said. "Taking action is the hardest part."

Mohr worked for years running radio stations and billboard companies. "I had a revelation that I wasn't going to own a radio station any time soon," he said. "I always felt there was a better way to do things than the way my bosses did it."

He sold everything, went from earning six figures to \$6,000 a year steaming oysters in a Baltimore restaurant. At the age of 33 he went to culinary school.

Dillo said he sees many people who have similar motivations to Mohr's.

Some people have a mid-career revelation that they're never going to be the CEO. Others may lose a job and think, "Maybe this is the catalyst for me to go do what I want to do," he said.

After spending time as an employed chef, Mohr saw a need for more upscale corporate catering — someone who would come in with white-linen tablecloths and silverware rather than boxed lunches, and who would clean up after lunch.

He studied, read books, wrote a strong business plan and shopped banks.

He also started small. In the summer of 2002 he opened a lunch shop in Regency Park, doing corporate catering from the kitchen.

He was proud of his homemade soups, which took about three hours each day to make. When surrounding offices began emptying, Mohr realized he needed to be proactive in shifting his business to stay successful.

He found his niche with corporate catering. Savor Hospitality also does weddings, special occasions and offers cooking classes in their building, a former restaurant.

Finding balance

Sturgis came from a family who owned their own distribution business in Florida.

"The belief that 'you can' came from my parents ... that, I'm very grateful for," she said.

She found her path her senior year in college when she took a class in organizational development — “Here’s a problem, how are you going to solve it?” — and loved helping companies solve problems and grow.

At one point early in her career, Sturgis was teaching a class in career- life revitalization. Twentysomething at the time, “I could only see possibilities,” she said.

By the end of the class some older employees who had felt “stuck” careerwise, felt more empowered that they, too, had options.

That class stuck with Sturgis.

“At that point I realized people spend so much time being the color they’re supposed to be that they forget what color they are inside,” she said. That “chameleon” analogy has been born in a children’s book Sturgis has written called “The Dance of the Chameleon,” due to be published in a few weeks (danceofthechameleon.com).

For Sturgis, going solo boiled down to a realization that she wanted independence more than she wanted to work for a corporation. She took her consulting business up a notch by finding a name, creating a Web site and doing some marketing.

Through her Web site and word of mouth, she keeps as busy as she wants to be. She said it is just the right balance as mother of two and wife to local musical conductor Al Sturgis.

What they’ve learned

Mohr says he sought out anyone with expertise in catering. He found a caterer in Raleigh who was willing to share his knowledge.

“Out of the kindness of his heart he opened his books ... and guided me in lots of respects,” Mohr said.

“We’ve tried to carry that spirit and do the same for others,” wife Heather added.

He and Heather can’t stress enough the importance of sales and networking as well as understanding the actual business end of “selling widgets,” or whatever business an entrepreneur is considering.

Mohr has read countless books, attends seminars and said, “Be a student of the career.”

Sturgis said she has found from her work that people tend to see themselves as the jobs they do when in fact they probably have other skills they have forgotten about. Redefine yourself according to all of your skills, she advises.

A planner and organizer, she is big on goal setting. How are you going to get there if you don’t know where you’re going, she asked.

Sturgis also recommended using the resources of places such as Wake Tech and SCORE, even the library.

Surround yourself with people who support your dream, and don’t be afraid to voice that dream out loud: “Talking about your dream is really important,” she said.

And one piece of advice she gives herself every day: “One day at a time, one step at a time and appreciate every single one of your accomplishments. Even if all you did today was go to the library and get a book, it’s a step in the right direction.”

Small-business resources

Wake Technical Community College is part of the Small Business Center Network of the North Carolina Community College System. It offers free counseling, business seminars and workshops and access to other resources and information. Details: waketech.edu.

Other online resources:

bplans.com

btools.com

ideasiteforbusiness.com

sba.gov

irs.gov

score.org

Contact Editor Wendy Lemus at 460-2605 or wlemus@nando.com.

By Wendy Lemus

© Copyright 2008, The News & Observer Publishing Company
A subsidiary of [The McClatchy Company](#) 