

## **It's a Small Business World**

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In 1987, Beth Moorcones' son was born.

That same year, she began her own business in her Sterling home.

Now, she's got two teenagers and a successful graphic design company, EWM Design.

Moorcones is one of Loudoun's thousands of small business owners, many of them home-based. Small business owners with 10 or less employees make up three of every four of Loudoun's 9,474 businesses, according to Dunn & Bradstreet's July 2005 MarketPlace Analysis. One in three businesses is a single-person business. As the only employee of EWM Design, Moorcones answers only to herself.

"I take care of the networking, the marketing, the purchasing," she said. "I wear all the hats: the producer, the boss, the grump. I do it all."

Moorcones' home-based business allowed her to be a mother: go to school assemblies, take care of sick children, eat dinner at home. On occasion, she had to choose. Work, or children.

"You're going to have to sacrifice something," she said. "Usually, it's not going to be your kids."

Even now, with two almost-grown teens, Moorcones can't imagine going back to an office environment.

"I think it would be very difficult to work for someone else," she said. "When you work for yourself, you get all the glory and all the blame."

LIKE MOORCONES, Jen Sterling thinks that family is an important element drawing home-based businesses to Loudoun County.

"I think there is a trend that's been happening over the last few years of nesting," she said. "People are a lot more comfortable in their home, and Loudoun County gives the opportunity to both live at home and work at home."

Sterling, chairman of the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, moved to South Riding when she was ready to start a family. She also started Hinge, a branding firm, in her home.

Little did she know, however, that her five employees were in violation of county regulations, which only allows one full-time employee in a home besides the residents

themselves.

The ensuing scramble to find space almost ended Hinge, and Sterling has made it her mission to change county regulations to allow more in-home employees. She's met with little success since taking over as chairman in January. "I have not found the right way to change it or the right people to talk to," Sterling said. While Hinge is now safely ensconced in a Reston office, Sterling's experience highlights one of the challenges facing small business owners: the problem of not knowing everything.

**AT THE LOUDOUN Small Business Development Center, executive director Giovanni Cozzarelli helps small business owners chip away at the mountain of knowledge needed to run a business smoothly.**

"When you are a one-person business, you've got to know a little bit of everything," Cozzarelli said. "Not everybody has that knowledge."

The Loudoun Small Business Development Center, a nonprofit, provides seminars that address taxes, licensing, accounting, marketing, insurance just about every issue that might confront a business.

The center also provides one-on-one counseling for owners.

Overall, the center provides services to about 2,100 customers a year who have an average of three to four employees.

Centers like this one are all across the country, and they're needed.

According to the Small Business Administration, in 2003, there were 572,900 new small businesses in the country but there were 584,800 closures.

While the vast majority of businesses in Loudoun have 10 or fewer employees, it's actually right in line with the region: 74.6 percent compared to Fairfax County's 74.9 percent and Prince William County's 77.4 percent.

THE RESOURCES provided by the Small Business Development Center and the Chamber of Commerce are critical to helping a small business succeed, said Tom Butler, who runs an accounting and tax firm, Butler Consulting Group, out of his Sterling home. Every month, Butler attends the chamber's networking breakfasts.

"There is no better way to meet at least 40 prospective clients every month," he said. Like Moorcones, Butler appreciates the flexibility his job gives him to spend time with his family. With his one-man firm a success, however, he's at a crossroads.

"I'm really at a decision point right now," he said. "To bring on somebody else is a big monetary investment."

Butler has some advice for potential new small business owners.

"Make sure you're the right person for it," he said. "Only you own the business. That takes dedication, commitment. Be prepared to work long hours."