



Whatcom County's mom-and-pop businesses to get recognition March 29

DAVE GALLAGHER - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

An important part of the Whatcom County economy will get well-deserved accolades later this month.

Tuesday, March 29, marks Mom and Pop Business Owners Day. Locally, Western Washington University's Small Business Development Center is organizing events that day to recognize the small husband-and-wife companies around the area.

A local map and directory is being put together to show participating businesses, and can be picked up Monday, March 21, at a variety of places, including the Downtown Bellingham Partnership at 1304 Cornwall Ave.

The event is meant to give the public a chance to drop in and learn more about the local businesses. Twelve participating businesses will win their owners a free dinner at the Amadeus Project building on Cornwall Avenue, catered by Fools Onion Catering and with entertainment by The Upfront Theatre.

"Mom-and-pop businesses have always been a vital, yet not fully appreciated part of the U.S. economy," Jennifer Shelton, the center's director, said in a press release. "There are many husband-wife business owner teams here in Whatcom County that work together to provide local jobs and unique products and services, and we wanted to take the opportunity to acknowledge these businesses."

One of the more than 90 businesses participating locally is Kids Northwest, a children's toy and clothing store on Cornwall Avenue. Janet and Mike Hodgins started the business in 1992 in what's now Sehome Village Shopping Center, and later moved to downtown Bellingham.

A big reason the Hodgins started a mom-and-pop businesses was because their combined skills made for a complete business. He has a background in accounting and financing and she has a background is merchandising, clothing and fashion.

That's something I've often noticed when meeting mom-and-pop business owners: One spouse is particularly talented handling the numbers and the back end of the business,

while the other tends to have a knack for the front end or the inventory. As a mom-and-pop business develops, many times the two roles become interchangeable.

At the time they started the business, the Hodgins' children were 2 and 5. They made adjustments much like other family businesses do: A back room was remodeled to be conducive for play time; when one parent needed to be at home or at an event, which one would take on that task was based on what was happening at the business.

Janet said the arrangement enabled them to spend more time with their children than if they both worked for someone else.

"That's the big plus to being self-employed," she said, adding that developing good time-management skills was a key to making it work.

While many mom-and-pop business owners have rules about trying to leave conversations about work at the business, the Hodgins did not. Neither minded if the other had a work-related idea at dinner.

"We didn't mind talking shop, especially if it led to a way to improve the business," Janet said.

While they didn't mind the all-consuming aspect of running a business, it's something to keep in mind for others who are thinking about starting their own.

"The business can be like having a child that never really grows up," Janet said. "There's a commitment level that always needs to be maintained."

For details on the local festivities for Mom and Pop Business Owners Day, call the center at 360-778-1762.

Reach DAVE GALLAGHER at dave.gallagher@bellinghamherald.com or call 715-2269.

Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/03/03/1896900/whatcom-countys-mom-and-pop-businesses.html#storylink=misearch#ixzz1HZKMaS5z>