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Businesses Looking for Smart, Local Hires

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East End businesses have struggled under the weight of a nationwide recession – cutting back on employees and reorganizing their business models to conform to a more frugal clientele, even on the affluent East End of Long Island.

“I don’t think we are at the end of the recession,” said Greg Ferraris, a certified public accountant at Banducci, Katz & Ferraris in Sag Harbor. “I think for most businesses, staffing levels are a key driver in profitability, and management has learned to do more with less.”

That being said, Ferraris did admit to unique businesses on the East End that, due to the seasonal popularity of the region, would increase their staff each spring, regardless of the recession. There are also other companies, he said, looking to hire if they can be assured that new employees will increase revenues. He said that even when cutting back, maintaining a high level of service, despite the tough times, is paramount to survival.

“Service is key,” said Ferraris.

Providing a new kind of service has been part of the magic occurring at Green Logic Energy, a firm that specializes in energy efficient and sustainable technologies like solar panels and geothermal heating and air conditioning and wind turbines.

Founded by Marc Clejan and Nick Albukrek, Green Logic Energy has shown a 200 percent growth in business over the last two years, and as a result is in the midst of hiring 22 new employees to serve their Southampton and Roslyn offices.

“We represent what is basically a whole new industry,” Clejan said on Tuesday. “The whole green sector is a growth industry right now and we are benefiting from that.”

However, Clejan said he believes Green Logic stands out from competitors on Long Island due to its business model, which is one focused on service, not just installation.

“We are an engineering, design, permitting and consulting business,” he said. “We don’t just contract.”

Green Logic informs clients about what technologies will be approved in different municipalities, designs the project, brings it before any necessary boards for permits and completes installation.

“We have never being turned down anywhere on Long Island – by any ARB or zoning board,” Clejan said, adding that Green Logic will not bring a project through a permitting process unless it has a fair chance of being approved.

Clejan also said the staff at Green Logic is ultimately responsible for the company’s growth. According to Albukrek, the quality of candidates that have applied to the firm is outstanding. So far, Green Logic has filled eight of the positions and Albukrek said he hopes to have all 22 slots filled in the next two weeks.

Sag Harbor surveyor F. Michael Hemmer is cautiously looking to add an administrative assistant to his staff, and like Green Logic, said the level of experience candidates have brought to the table has been superior, in some ways beyond what he hoped for.

“We did put ‘entry-level’ in as a qualifier and we are getting responses from people with excellent experience, but there is no way we can bring someone in on that level because we won’t be able to give them the pay they want or deserve,” said Hemmer.

Like Green Logic, Hemmer said his business has muscled through the recession, mostly due to their level of services.

“We appreciate that we are in Sag Harbor, and opening our business here has been a blessing because we seem to really fit in,” he said.

Morrissey Advisory Services, also in Sag Harbor, offers healthcare benefits consulting and brokerage services across Long Island, but executive officer Tom Morrissey said a key to his business is hiring locally.

Morrissey, whose wife and business partner Susan is a Sag Harbor native, said the firm has just hired Heather Whelan, a local in her early 20s, and would like to continue the trend.

“People like to do business locally and we do intend to hire more smart, young people like her – people who know how businesses operate out here,” said Morrissey.

Ray Smith and Associates, the Southampton-based landscape design, tree care, property maintenance and irrigation specialists, have also found themselves growing despite the recession by expanding the services they offer, according to marketing director Howard Goldenberg.

The 14-year-old business recently acquired Dave Greene’s 20-year old property management business, with Greene joining the team at Ray Smith and Associates. Expanding into areas like irrigation and landscape maintenance was “a natural

extension,” said Goldenberg and enabled the company to expand services for its current client base, as well as reach out to a new group of customers.

According to Goldenberg, the company is currently seeking irrigation technicians and pest control applicators and has been searching for more than a month for the right applicants. For the most part, he said, applicants have been qualified in other industries, but have lacked the outdoor or horticultural experience the business is looking for in a new employee.

“They are not just overqualified – they don’t have the background we are looking for,” he said.

Overall, Goldenberg said the company is optimistic about the coming season, despite the recession.

“We are cautiously optimistic, as they say.”

Goldenberg said some optimism stems from their loyal client base, and the level of service the firm aims to provide each customer.

“In some ways, we may be benefiting from companies that are not as good,” he said. “Some are gone – they just couldn’t hold on.”

Restaurateur David Loewenberg agreed that companies that fail to provide high quality products and services are the ones hardest hit on the East End, especially in his industry.

“I think these economic upturns and downturns – they shake the business up,” said Loewenberg. “I think you find it is the same in every industry – the weaker operators will fall by the wayside, and those who are strong, committed and have chosen to make this their profession will make it.”

In addition to continuing with a prix fixe menu at both Red Bar and Fresno, Loewenberg extended the season at his Sag Harbor restaurant, Beacon, into the fall due to the lagging economy, in an effort to boost revenue, but also to keep his employees working.

Loewenberg said his businesses are always looking for front of the house employees at the start of the season, and his employees, many like family, tend to remain in the fold for years.

“We have a very loyal staff and we are loyal to them,” he said. “We are lucky.”