

A Look At Andover Businesses In The Current Economic Woes

By Heather Makechnie
Beacon staff

Ross Gittell, a University of New Hampshire professor who specializes in economic forecasts for the state and New England, says in *New Hampshire Business Review* that New Hampshire will fare better than other states in the region and the country, but will lose an estimated 16,000 jobs into 2010 and see unemployment rise to 7.4 percent — up from the current 4.3 percent rate.

He says the retail, financial, and construction sectors are expected to see sizable job losses as consumers have slowed down their spending and new building projects are being put on hold. However, he says that we are now in the steepest part of the decline and the economy should stabilize by the end of the year.

The *Beacon* contacted a few local businesses to see whether Andover is feeling the pinch. All of these businesses are members of New Hampshire Made, a group which helps market small businesses in New Hampshire. Andover resident Laurie Ferguson, the executive director, explains that the businesses selected all tend to be in the artisan or tourism sector.

"I get contacted a lot by media, asking what I see happening in the economy. I have to say that there is no easy answer, because there are many different types of business," says Laurie. "Have we lost any members in New Hampshire Made? Yes, you bet. Businesses are going under. But for every business we lose, another business joins. And there are a lot of people who have lost their jobs in another company who are now starting their own business."

"No question," says Laurie, "retail is hurting. The restaurants are hurting. The highway toll-booth count is way down. Lodging is way down. Big stores are hurting. But many small businesses are doing very nicely."

Continues Laurie, "People are taking every opportunity to network, to co-market, to partner their business with another business. They are sharing

booth space at fairs, they are sharing advertising space, they are joining shipping and mailing cooperatives, and they are being very creative about marketing themselves."

Country Pine Furniture

Joan Osteen at Country Pine Furniture, which makes handcrafted, long-lasting pine, oak, cherry, maple, and ash furniture, from stools to entertainment centers, says that the economy has been very bothersome.

"Our revenue is down quite a bit, much lower than last year at this time. Our orders are down, and people are really shopping around for contract work. If they want an entertainment center, for example, they will shop and they will settle for pine rather than cherry.

"Our pumpkin and wreath sales were lousy. We still have some of the wreaths hung on our building. Our Christmas trees saved us. We had the best trees at the best price, and we sold out. That seems to be what people are looking at, price and value. We're looking forward now to lawn furniture season."

Country Spun Treasures

Marsha Siegel has officially closed her Country Spun Treasures Quilt Shop on Flaghole Road and is currently selling off her inventory. It was a business move she planned even before her husband, Gary, died at the end of October. "There simply was not enough traffic at this location. I have to say, though, that this winter's Open House, which is my big showcase sale, was at least as good as last year. I was very surprised. I will continue to hold the Open House."

Marsha continues, "I may sell my horses, but I won't sell my Jacob sheep. I will continue to operate my wool business from this location, selling their fleece for spinning and quilting."

MooseMan Nature Photos

Rick "MooseMan" Libbey's MooseMan Nature Photos features moose and loon photos shot from a kayak in wilderness settings. His products include matted and framed prints, stationery, jewelry, and calendars. Services include

slide shows and wildlife discussions.

Rick says he has found the last part of 2008 to be a perplexing but rewarding time for his business, which is in its fifth year. "I thought that my business would get hit, but instead I find that my retail sales are up 200%. This is the revenue I get from craft fairs and festivals, etc. If I had to guess, I would say that this is because people are staying local with their money.

"Also, my speaking engagements (the best part of my job) are way up. Where I am seeing a decline is in the wholesale part, the products I try to place with small shops and stores. They are being very careful, and I have to accept a much lower minimum order."

New England House B&B

Chris Bengivengo at the 1906-built New England House Bed and Breakfast on Main Street reports that, while earlier in 2008 they saw 110 days when they had at least one booking, in December they went 30 days with no clients at all. "We are currently at a 50% decrease over last year. We are fortunate in that we are right next to Proctor Academy, and parents will come to see their children no matter what. Also, most of our business tends to be three seasons, with winter being quieter."

Chris moans that when oil prices soared they locked into a fuel price that now has them paying \$1.50 per gallon over market price. "The double wham-

my of low patronage and fuel prices is killing us." He says that with tourism dollars down, their strategy is to co-market with Ragged Mountain Resort and with other bed and breakfasts.

They also are trying to attract local dollars. "With 16 seats, we can entertain small groups very well. Wedding or shower parties, craft groups, teas, special dinners, business groups, romantic get-aways ... we are an excellent place for local residents." Bengivengo says that they remain "guardedly optimistic."

The Constant Quilter

Linda Barnes is the owner of The Constant Quilter, which sells quilting supplies and notions and hosts workshops and classes. Linda says that they really felt a slow-down in December, which was unusual in that December is usually the busiest time of year.

"However, it was a really busy fall. And business is picking back up again in January. We have been able to keep all our help. We're being very careful not to over-order our inventory. And we're reining in advertising.

"Last year's shop hops [when several quilt shops put together progressive events] were very beneficial for us. I have put together one myself called the Leprechaun Tour in March, connecting eight shops. And we are happy to provide space for any group that wants to get together to do craft projects."

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Trailside Cafe Closes In East Andover Marketplace

By Heather Makechnie
Beacon staff

Denise Keene had hoped that changing the focus of her convenience store to a cafe would save her business, but she readily admits that this economy has gotten the best of her. The Trailside Cafe in the East Andover Marketplace closed at the end of January.

Keene's tenants at the end of her building at 776 Franklin Highway, KJ's Pet and Sport, will move their business into the larger space Denise has vacated. Kevin and Jennifer opened the new business in November.

Says Jennifer, "We have a wonderful location, and the timing was right. We are going to run a full convenience

store. While we will still sell pet and sport products, we will also sell pre-made sandwiches, salads, and beverages, as well as tobacco and alcohol. There will be lots and lots of coffee — nice gourmet coffee, and plenty of snacks. We want to have a nice place for local people to gather. There will be a section of fine wines and gourmet items. We'll sell souvenirs and local products. And of course, DVDs."

Jennifer says their plans still include sponsorship of outdoor events. She expects the new store to be open in February.

Denise Keene says the smaller of the two spaces will now be available for rent.

The Constant Quilter

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