

Small Business News & Notes

Small Business, Big Impact

(NAPSA)—Your neighborhood coffee shop where everyone knows your name—and your favorite type of pie; the local mechanic you trust with your car; the hardware store that has been family run for three generations: These are the images that come to mind when many people think of “small businesses.”

Did you know, however, that small businesses, those with fewer than 500 employees, play a big part in the U.S. economy? The Small Business Administration reports that small businesses represent 99.7 percent of all American companies and they have generated 60 to 80 percent of new jobs annually over the last decade.

The average small-business employer has one location and 10 employees, according to the Census Bureau, and those businesses help communities thrive.

For instance, independent fuel marketers who are part of the CITGO network of approximately 7,000 locally-owned and operated stations supply fuel to retail locations that in turn serve customers throughout the country and help keep the economy running. These small-business operators say they share a number of common traits—integrity, hard work, a desire to help their neighbors, and a commitment to their local communities.

Jose Rodriguez, who runs one of the fuel stations in Tampa, Fla., defines his role as someone on whom his neighbors can depend.

“Being a local business owner, I’m more competitive and more in touch than a corporate store; this means my customers get more for their money,” Rodriguez said. “We



Small-business owners are tied to their community socially and economically.

strive to give every customer a pleasant experience and believe in treating customers with respect and giving back to the community. We donate to the state highway patrol fund for officers lost in the line of duty, and we give to the Muscular Dystrophy Association.”

Rodriguez is not alone in operating a small business that understands the needs of the local community. In Naugatuck, Conn., Lew Salerno of Harbor Petroleum has been keeping locally-owned gas stations in his area supplied with fuel for more than 25 years. He now works with 33 CITGO stations in both rural and inner-city locations.

“In today’s economy, price can often be a bigger factor than loyalty when picking a gas station,” Salerno said. “So when I see the same families from soccer games and my local church stopping at our stations, it is a great feeling.

“We support the local police departments, Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, and local sports teams with fundraisers and charity events,” Salerno added. “My neighbors are, in turn, helping my local business, so the circle keeps going.”

Dan Besch of Garrow Oil & Propane in Appleton, Wis. takes a slightly different approach. A family-owned operation, Garrow Oil understands the challenges of running a small business in a tough economic climate.

“The volatile oil market has put a financial strain on everyone—from business owners to consumers,” Besch said. “We supply a network of almost 60 independent stations and know the issues they face.

“By helping them improve their operations to be more efficient, they build better relationships with their customers and ensure their local communities have the quality fuel they need at a price that meets their budget,” Besch said. “We have a commitment to our dealers to provide fair prices and great service, so they can do the same for the people shopping at their stations.”

It is clear that no matter where you go, communities across the country depend on small businesses for jobs, taxes and services. In the case of CITGO, almost 50,000 jobs support a network of approximately 7,000 retail locations in the United States. Hardworking entrepreneurs such as Rodriguez, Salerno and Besch represent the many independent owners who keep America strong. To support locally-owned stations in the area, visit www.citgo.com.

Note to Editors: The man in the photo is Jose Rodriguez, a CITGO station owner in Tampa, Fla.