

# Thriving in TOUGH TIMES

## Up when down: Some Valley business owners are creating their own success in tough times

By STEPHENIE SLAHOR

There seem to be two prevailing assessments of the state of the current economy. Some optimists say we've hit the bottom and will be heading into more positive territory, while others say we are still in decline. Those with a more bleak perspective contend that we remain in a full blown recession, but no matter where you fall in the debate, it's clear that revenue growth and profitability is not easy to make happen these days.

"In this last year or so, we have really been forced to get more creative and think outside the box in terms of what we offer our clients," says Jonas Udcoff, President of Cord Media. "In these uncertain times, we find ourselves working longer hours with a smaller staff but for the right reasons."

Udcoff and his partner, Jaci Fitzsimonds, opened their full service marketing firm in 2007. The agency employs an integrated approach to advertising, public relations, website design, graphic design, events and other needs. Their efforts garnered the pair a coveted PRiSM Award (Professional Recognition in Sales and Marketing) in December 2009 from the Building Industry Association.

"Social media websites like Facebook and Twitter have been invaluable in helping to trim our bottom line, while still allowing us to offer the same level of service to our clients," says Fitzsimonds. "We pride ourselves on having close personal relationships with people, which I think pays off in the long run no matter what the economy indicates."

The Cord Media team isn't alone in its pursuit of alternative means of business promotion. **Danielle Pinkerton**, who opened PINK Tanning & Body Spa in August of 2009, also points to her use of social media tools as a crucial means of

promotion. She believes much of PINK's early success is tied to her 'take charge' philosophy; she personally handles most of the small, but important details relating to everyday business operations.

"I am on Facebook all the time, and I'm constantly networking with people and promoting PINK and our events in as many ways as I can," says Pinkerton, who worked at the La Quinta Resort for four years before opening her business inside Gold's Gym in Palm Desert. "The larger our internet fan base becomes, the more repeat business we receive. People feel more comfortable when they can put a face to the name. At the spa, I am the person who answers the phones and I'm also the esthetician, so I think it's the close personal touch that keeps our clients coming back."

While Pinkerton is seeing green in her corner of the business world, the overall slowdown in retail spending has certainly had an effect on commercial real estate brokers in the Valley. Many companies are reeling from vacancies and tight credit as they struggle to refinance their own debt, and brokers are now forced to get more creative in their efforts to stay afloat.

"I've experienced at least two bad markets during the last 20 years, but nothing like what we're dealing with now," says **Heather Sharp**, President of Sharp Commercial, Inc. in Palm Desert. In anticipation of more tough times, she created a property management division within the company in order to create a more stable stream of income.



Sharp Commercial, Inc. focuses on commercial leasing, sales and management exclusively in the Coachella Valley. Projects include Heritage Court Shopping Center at Fred Waring and Jefferson Street in Indio, The Indio Towne Center at I-10 and Jackson Street, The Marketplace at Varner Road and

Washington Street in Palm Desert and Plaza Calle Tampico on Calle Tampico in La Quinta Cove, just west of Washington Street.

"In terms of leasing and selling in a bad economy, it has become a back to basics approach for us," Sharp explains. "You really do have to get out there and let people know who you are all over again, because the market is simply not good enough to sit back and wait for clients to come to you. It is no longer good enough to stick a sign in the ground in the hopes that someone comes through the door."

Sharp says she and her team are getting even more involved with the owners of their retail properties, keeping them abreast of what is happening in the market. She has also started to offer incentives to lessees in older valley shopping centers that have undergone facelifts. Sharp received a recent boost when she and her firm were named recipients of the CoStar Power Broker and CoStar Power Brokerage Awards, respectively, a nationwide designation as the industry's top performing commercial real

estate professionals or brokerage firms.

The consensus among these business owners is that there is no magic bullet when it comes to fixing an economic downturn that was years in the making. However, with ingenuity and a focus on personalized service firmly in place, they are ready to confront the myriad of challenges that will undoubtedly arise, as the financial market takes its twists and turns towards an eventual recovery.

*Thriving in Tough Times is an ongoing series of features in The Public Record focused on Coachella Valley organizations that are implementing innovative strategies and tactics which are helping them succeed even during this challenging economy. If your organization – or one you know about – is thriving, please send a message about it to Bob Marra at bob@coachella-valley.com and we'll try to cover it.*

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**THE PUBLIC RECORD** (ISSN 0744-205X), is published weekly for \$59.95 per year by **The Public Record**, 303 N Indian Canyon Dr, Palm Springs, CA 92262, (760) 771-1155, Fax (760) 771-1188. Periodical postage paid at Palm Springs, CA 92262. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to **The Public Record**, 78-370 Hwy 111, Ste 250, La Quinta, CA 92253.

**The Public Record** is an approved newspaper of general circulation for those required by law to cause publication of legal notices. **The Public Record** was adjudicated by the Superior Court of the State of California for the County of Riverside, Case No. 49271, Filed March 31, 1987. **The Public Record** is a newspaper of general circulation ascertained and established in the City of Palm Springs in the County of Riverside, State of California, Case No. RIC 358286, Filed June 8, 2001. The information contained in **The Public Record** is taken from public records. **The Public Record** assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions. The original public records are open to public inspection and should be consulted before any action is taken on information contained herein. The material published in **The Public Record** is compiled at a substantial expense for the exclusive use of subscribers. **The Public Record** is available through UMI in one or more of the following formats: microform, electronic or paper. The material cannot be republished, resold, recorded, or used in any manner, in whole or part, without the consent of the publisher. Any infringement will be subject to legal redress. Opinions expressed in guest editorials are those of the author and do not represent those of **The Public Record**, its owners, or its employees.

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