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Business

Campbell businesses patronize local merchants for their needs



By **Michelle C. Crowe**

One special hallmark of many Campbell business owners is that once they've established themselves in the city, they strive to support other local businesses.

An example of this friendly and loyal trend was evidenced when **Stoddard's Brewhouse and Eatery's owner, Bob Stoddard**, commissioned seven reproductions of **artist Bruni Sablan's** distinctive works. Sablan's gallery is located in Campbell.

Another example of this trend is **Ricky Critchfield**, owner of **Critchfield Construction**, 125 Dillon Ave. "Six of my main vendors are all located right here. Campbell's a happening little town for small businesses," Critchfield says. "I just lucked out in locating here, but I'm trying to purchase a commercial building before my lease comes up so I can stay."

Building is in Critchfield's blood. His grandfather and father worked in construction. In 1984, upon completing four years of service in the U.S. Air Force, Critchfield worked locally on various remodeling projects throughout the valley. By 1994 he found his work in such demand that he began pursuing his

contractor's license. By 1999, he'd incorporated and moved the business out of his home and into his location on Dillon Avenue. Today, he has 15 employees and revenues in excess of \$1 million.

"Business has been booming here for about the past four years. I know there's an economic slowdown, but we haven't really seen it," says Critchfield, adding that he gets most of his building supplies from **Economy Lumber**, 720 Camden Ave., and glass and windows from **C & Z Glass Company**, 2175 S. Winchester Blvd. and **Landmark Window and Door Company**, 1323 S. Winchester Blvd. His T-bar specialist is with **Bay Area Acoustics**, he subleases to his HVAC specialist, and he rents tools from **A Tool Shed** at 900 Dell Ave.

"As far as **Economy Lumber**, any slightly higher prices are more than made up for in the money they save me with their service. The prices on items may be a percent or two higher, but I get help loading stuff on the truck or having it delivered to the job site for free, which is something you just can't expect from other companies. Economically, using local vendors makes way more sense. Plus there's the selection. Economy has way more of what we need."

Critchfield explains that in the T-11 siding selection alone, Economy offers five choices, compared to its competitors, who only offer one. Economy's delivery people know the mountain roads where Critchfield's clients are, too. Even though it takes less time to get up to the summit than to Mountain View, some contractors won't even show up once they hear it's in the mountains, he says.

Although horror stories on construction projects abound, Critchfield doesn't believe those need to happen. Besides keeping a core team of specialists, he strives for the "gold standard" in his industry by maintaining expensive general liability insurance (which he estimates less than 5 percent of contractors have, as it costs at least \$16,000 annually - even for those with perfect records). "When you're working on people's homes, you really should have the gold

standard," he says. "Every year, the market gets tougher, because fewer and fewer insurance carriers offer it and it gets more expensive." Critchfield's insurance company is local also - **Talmadge & Associates** in the **Water Tower Building** at 300 Orchard City Drive, as is his legal representation, attorney **David Bicknell** of **Bicknell & Sweet** at 901 Campisi Way.

One of the largest projects Critchfield is working on happens to involve another local business - the **Pavilion Theatres** in San Jose, now owned by **Paul Gunsky**, who is also the owner of **CineLux Theatres (formerly Plaza Theatres)**.

Critchfield is the prime contractor for the project, which is being built on land owned by the **city of San Jose** and managed by **Forest Properties**. Although the location has yet to be successful for any businesses that have been located there, Critchfield and others believe that Campbell's no-nonsense sensibility is just the factor to make that location finally profitable. If all goes well, the eight-screen, 70,000-square-foot project will open in November 2002.

"I'm a firm believer that if it's done right, this industry will always be here. The trick is to stay here, keep your license and insurance current and keep a good team of people together, whatever it takes," he says.

By offering insurance benefits and uniforms to employees, as well as the use of trucks to key personnel, he works to keep his core group happy. (Not surprisingly, the company Christmas party was held in Campbell, too - he rented the entire facility of **Alie's Corner Cafe** for the function.)

Critchfield estimates that about 35 percent of his business these days lies in new construction, about 50 percent in additions, whether a single room or second story, and the remainder in kitchens and baths. He finds that customers typically get more bang for the buck on \$30,000 to \$50,000 jobs.

"So many contractors seem to treat the business as a hobby, but not us. I have a brutal terms and conditions

contract for all of my subcontractors, outlining my expectations about their performance," Critchfield says. "When you're working on people's homes, which is usually the biggest investment of their lives, you've got to be the gold standard."

For more information on Critchfield Construction, call 408.379.1777 or visit www.critchfieldconstruction.com.

Got a local business news tip? Contact Michelle C. Crowe at 408.378.9056 or alwriters@hotmail.com.

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