



find your

Flavor

WRITTEN BY JOHN SCHOPP

FIND A TREE AMONG THE FOREST ~ SUPPORT INDIE BUSINESSES

My topic this month is sure to divide the room. Those of you that run your own business will get what I am saying, while the rest of you may not. I admittedly was on the other side of the fence (though not necessarily out in the pasture) until I began to walk in my business moccasins. Business is HARD. It can be fun, rewarding, stimulating, empowering etcetera, but it definitely is HARD! Academics did very little to prepare me for the reality of creating and maintaining a successful business.

For those of you that have never had to sell something in order to pay for overhead or make a payroll, may not get what I am trying to say. Those of you that have will get it instantly. I am not talking about managing a department or business professionals, but actually owning this business and your livelihood being tied to it. I look at the entrepreneur with different eyes now. I see the struggle, sacrifices, success rates, competition from the outside, dreams, and ultimate financial ruin that is seldom discussed openly. While everybody seems to talk about quality and artisanship, I have found most customers are focused mainly on price or convenience and most employees primarily on self gain. My aim is not to cry or place blame but merely draw attention to the obvious. The owner of a business is often on an island alone.

I find it odd that business owners are reluctant to talk about the challenges of maintaining a business. It is like "taboo" to mention that payroll was tough to meet this period. Even our professional business organizations and networking groups tend to talk more about their needs for survival instead of the individual businesses that comprise the group. For some reason...America seems to think that women (minorities) have a disadvantage and need some sort of leg up in business. I have found the exact opposite to be true. Many women have fierce, deft and brilliant business minds. They also have empathy, which I believe to be an innate advantage in juggling the multiple personalities one interacts with daily in the business world. I think most business owners take pride in winning over customers based on niche, quality, service and even price on an even playing field. With that said, I would like to talk specifically about two (of the many) women in business that I respect immensely. Both of these ladies have vision, strength, business integrity and a powerful love for what they do and it is reflected in their businesses.



I first met *Patty Trostle* as she interviewed me as a potential caterer for her daughter Amanda's wedding July 26th 2003. The glorious event was going to be an outdoor wedding at their beautiful home off of Apple road. Shortly after the wedding the Trostle's moved to Louisville Kentucky to start a new chapter in their lives.

Shortly after the wedding, photographer Jeff Greenough submitted images of Amanda and John's photo worthy wedding to The Knot, which were published as a colorful feature on Weddings in the South. It wasn't long before Patty was getting calls in Louisville to use their home as a wedding venue for others to enjoy. Once Patty made the decision to open this home to events, she immediately began to address the property's user friendliness.

Fast forward to 2010 and one of the more pristine outdoor venues the Blue Ridge has to offer...Sundara, located just 20 minutes from Roanoke, Smith Mountain Lake and Historic Downtown Rocky Mount Virginia.

The journey to Sundara is a peaceful transition from Interstate 220, to a truly magical place. As you travel down a quite paved road, lined with a mature apple orchard on one side and fresh fields of hay on the other, your mind suddenly starts to leave all of the world's worries behind. The stately plantation home, built by Jacob Boone in the early 1800's, sets at the base of the beautiful Cahas Mountains and is perfectly shaded by ancient hardwoods. The first thing that you notice as you leave the protective shell of your automobile is the quiet. As your ears get use to this new environment, you slowly start to notice the sound of the wind as it brushes along the mountain trees and the birds singing a diversity of songs as they dance throughout the property.

The next thing you are likely to notice is the beautifully manicured grounds with terraced gardens, butterfly gardens, 175 (give or take) English boxwoods and two very majestic magnolia trees. As you follow the thoughtful stone walkways that gracefully guide you from parking areas, upper and lower terraces, around the home, bathhouse, and bridal porch, you will most likely be tempted to "step off the path" to explore. That's what this property is ALL about. It is loaded with interesting areas for you and your guest to personalize the experience of attending an event. A little creek happily babbles under a unique sitting gazebo/bridge which leads to a small open lawn. A well kept barn anchors the backdrop of the guest parking area and a beautifully restored cook's house serves as a charming bathhouse for the guests (no porta cans needed here). A beautiful stone patio was installed under the tent to address the bumpy ground and



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dead grass issues inherent to outdoor weddings. The house was modified with the wedding party's comfort in mind, adding a very cool (pun intended) billiards room for the groomsmen to change and relax in before the ceremony. The opposite side of the house offers a bridal changing room complete with large mirror, antique make-up table and private porch for her bridesmaids.

Patty realized that as beautiful as this setting was, it could only achieve success as a business by properly addressing the unseen amenities. With the immediate needs of Sundara's clients met, Patty quickly turned to the needs of the vendors that would ultimately service Sundara's guests. Outdoor lighting was added, electrical upgrades for bands and lighting effects, the garage was converted to a lovely warming kitchen with ceiling fans, running water and stoves. Tables and chairs were added as well as a very cool cache of unique vintage and antique props for use in the design of the events to follow. My personal favorite is the antique bathtub that can most often be found filled to the top with ice and cold bottles of beer. I am currently lobbying for a Chef recliner to be added next to this feature.

I asked Patty what I thought was the obvious question. What makes a retired North Cross Spanish Teacher want to have hundreds of people parade through your pristine property ever weekend? What about your privacy. The answer that came was simple. Patty loves working with young people, she loves to garden and the privacy issue has been managed through thoughtful remodeling. Patty truly wants the patrons of Sundara to have a beautiful memory as well as a spectacular event. As far as business goes Patty has thought of just about everything to create a magical, user friendly event site, it is nearly turn key and is operated by caring loving people. If you are interested in booking Sundara you can check them out at (mysundara.com), but don't wait too long they book fast...for a reason!

Bayla Sussman is a relatively new friend. It is no secret that I like to spend the little down time allotted me, with my wife Karen. The place we usually go to escape is Annie Moore's Pub. It didn't take long for us to stumble upon Baylee's Best Chocolates, just across the parking lot. Before we entered the store we were hit with the pungent sweet smell of really good chocolate. Modestly, I do have a nose for that sort of thing. As we entered the shop my attention immediately went past the gorgeous display cases of finely crafted chocolates, to the windows behind the counter which provided me a view of the kitchen. It looked like a chocolate paradise. There were three (I think) tempering machines in full swing, caramel rulers, candy cutters, marble slabs and trays of truffles curing on a speed rack...Oi! We had stumbled on "The Real Deal", somebody that actually makes artisan candy by hand. I now had to taste and judge my skill against Bayla's. Though hard for my ego to swallow, I have to admit my own limitations, Bayla was the bomb! I visited the shop many times before I made an introduction (believe it or not, I am shy). The topic quickly turned to sourcing premium ingredients, finding good labor, current market trends and of course flavors. What I enjoy about Bayla is her approach to confection and flavor profile. She embraces the 'no waste' philosophy that is present in almost all successful cooks. I think that some of her more brilliant inspirations were created with the sole intent of not wasting a little leftover treasure from a previous run. Personally I love this "every bit gets used in something" philosophy. Please don't get hung up on this subtle detail...the cases are filled with high quality tried and true customer favorites!

Bayla's background is one of generations of hard working women. She has a BS in Theatre Arts from Northwestern University with a major in Acting. As a Chocolatier, Bayla draws on her heightened awareness she learned as an actress. "I think chocolate can engage all the senses" she states, and I rely on them openly to discover new flavors, scents and ideas. Bayla believes work can be fun and that fun transpires to the customers that visit the shop. She expects her employees to think (which I find to be a rare quality in today's younger workforce) and take pride in the chocolates they craft. She believes quality is not a fad. She also believes chocolate can ease any bad day or enhance an already good day. Who could argue with that?

In conclusion, a business community is like a forest, if a tree dies or gets cut down, others will grow in its place and the forest remains. This may work out just fine for landlords and governments seeking tax revenues, but what about you? What about the specific tree that used to shade you every weekend when you were growing up? What about the tree that you carved your first love's initials in? Those trees were special with intangible value. They shared with you and connected with you on a deeper level. Please support your local indie businesses and appreciate the intangibles that they bring along. It may cost you a little more, but think about what you are really getting from that relationship.

I miss Chico's Pizza on the Market...and the memories that Chico and his business have given me. The forest is still there but the Chico tree is gone and that saddens me.



Cook with courage, passion and purpose...the rest will follow.

Love,
Chef John
aka The Lorax

John Schopp is owner of Center Stage Catering and Edible Vibe. He and his beautiful family live (outside the box) in Rocky Mount, where rockstar catering is created, and the edible vibes are delectable! www.centerstagefood.com