PART TWO

**Niche business hopefuls: what do they need to succeed?**

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Marcy Misner/Amy

**Niche—FEATURE2**

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ANCHOR TAG Yesterday Marcy Misner examined why some niche businesses are doing well, even in smaller communities, like Michigan’s UP. Today she examines what it takes for a new business to get up and running with a niche product.

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Plans are in the works for a family fun center in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. It would be the first of its kind on both sides of the border, according to the authors of the plan, Sault residents Craig Grambau and Zachary Spurr.

**And in our surveys a lot of people who filled it out were Canadian. *Coming over for the Downtown Days.* So the Canadian interest is there.  *Because there’s nothing for them to do over in Sault, Ontario, either.* They don’t have a family fun center there. *We checked; there’s nothing in Ontario, locally, anyway, for them to do. People are filling out these surveys saying we need something and we will cross the bridge for it.* Yeah. (:21)**

They say they hope to be open early next summer.

**It has to appeal to, at least in my opinion, more than just a small segment of the population in order to be successful. (:08)**

John Allison is senior vice president at Central Savings Bank. He has seen a lot of business plans come through and here’s what they need to have.

**How often are parents or someone else going to take children to a business like this? (:08)**

Parents know in the Sault there are only a handful of hotel pools, fast-food play places and one gymnasium that can act as venues for birthday parties during the 6 months when there’s snow on the ground. The entrepreneurs say offering a party planner and partnering with a successful local restaurant will give them clout with parents all year long.

Allison says prospective owners must have a market study.

**A bank’s going to look at: do you have the financial wherewithal , do you have the experience, what type of track record can you provide us for this type of a business, and you’re going to have to have money. You’ve got to put money down. The bank’s going to require you have 25% of whatever it’s going to cost down. Your money. Your skin in the game. (:22)**

Allison says even though running a business in the Upper Peninsula employs the same business principles found anywhere, the UP is insulated from the business swings that affect an industrial city. That, he says, can work in a capitalist’s favor.

**Again, we don’t have the highs and the lows that the rest of the state does. Here in Sault Ste. Marie, specifically, we do not have a big business such as the automotive industry that’s subject to the cyclic nature of the economy. We don’t have that. We don’t have employers that are going to lay off 200 people for six months and maybe call 100 of them back, or – so we’re a little more stable, in that aspect of it. (:26)**

Yesterday, we told you about the Great Lakes Boatbuilding School in Cedarville, in the UP. It’s keeping afloat, at least in part, because it’s a good fit with the surrounding community.

Bonnie Mickelson is one of the residents who helped organize the school. She says the principles they used may be a lesson for the rest of the state.

**Everyone should work together. You have your Western Michigan culture and then of course your auto industry, Detroit, and they’re totally different cultures but they could work together to save this wonderful state. (laughs) It’s true. (:15)**

Mickelson says the school looks 10 years out, and now organizers are trying to lay groundwork for a culinary school in the UP.

**Now if we can do the same thing, maybe not in that amount with something like the culinary school, which isn’t underway yet. We’re still trying to acquire the property and if we can’t get the property at a reasonable price, I don’t know. We’re looking everywhere. (:16)**

Mickelson says the plan is to make the culinary school available to 4H students and encourage graduates to stay and open restaurants in the area.

The keys to success seem, run the gamut from paperwork for the bank to outreach in the community. The planners of the family entertainment center believe they’ve done their homework, and they hope, next summer, Soo area residents and visitors will have one more niche business to enjoy. when it comes to offering something that can’t be found in the Upper Peninsula or Sault, Ontario. They want to provide a year-round business that will offer services beyond the summer tourism appetite by partnering

SOQ

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A third cookbook is being released this week, with parties planned at all 5 stores.