

LAKES BUSINESSES



Staff photo by Derek Davis

Paul Lawrence operates Home Project Partners, a service for people seeking reliable contractors, out of his Buxton home.

Helping homeowners find contractors

Q. How did your business start?

A. I started this referral service, which helps contractors find work and homeowners find reputable contractors, because I'd been disappointed with the results of some home projects I had hired out.

In all fairness, it was partly my fault because I didn't take the time to properly screen the contractors.

Choosing a contractor is probably the most important decision in any home project. Locating a reliable, quality home contractor who will actually return your call and then show up when they said they would is a major hurdle the homeowner must face.

To find a reputable contractor takes time and effort. Most homeowners don't have the time to do a thorough job screening potential contractors. I established the business in November 2002, hoping to be able to provide such a service.

The service is free to homeowners; we're paid by contractors on a sliding scale once they've been hired by a homeowner.

Q. Why did you choose to locate your business in this area?

A. I have lived in the Greater Portland area most of my life. It is a great place to live, raise a family and run a business such as this.

The demographics for this area are ideal for the service I offer. There are plenty of two-income families who have no time for themselves, never mind finding the time to locate con-

tractors for their home projects. This area also has many quality home contractors in numerous trades, which may be contrary to popular belief.

Q. How do you plan to grow your business?

A. With my original business plan I had hoped to be doing well in Greater Portland within three years. I feel that has been accomplished. My main focus to grow the business has been through networking and some advertising.

We are always looking for new reputable contractors in various trades to help with the demand. In addition, we hope our new Web site will take the business to a new level.

Q. Why did you choose this line of business?

A. This business reflects many of my business and personal strengths. I have skills in marketing and knowledge of the home-construction industry.

The best thing about this business is that it is recession proof. When the economy is good, homeowners have the financial resources to remodel and build. In slower times, when interest rates are low, homeowners can refinance or take out a home-equity loan. In any economy, homes will always require repairs and maintenance.

This is also a "feel good" kind of business. I hear back from clients who were frustrated with previous contractors they had hired but now have renewed faith because of my efforts. Homeowners just want to hear back from someone when they

MY BUSINESS

HOME PROJECT PARTNERS

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call with a project request.

Q. What's different about your business?

A. This service helps eliminate the fear of contractor scams and acts as a safeguard for homeowners, especially the elderly.

Home Project Partners is an organized network of reliable, skilled contractors in various trades. I screen all contractors for required licenses and insurances. Contractors also need to provide me with five verifiable references, and I check on them further by contacting the Better Business Bureau.

What makes this service unique is response time. Contractors in the network agree to contact potential clients within 48 hours after hearing from me. This rarely happens in this industry. Also, if a network contractor is hired, I am available to answer questions, address concerns and help ensure that the project is completed to the homeowner's satisfaction.

Our service is appealing to

homeowners because in addition to being free, there is no obligation to use contractors that are referred by us.

We also make sure to check in periodically while projects are in progress, and we pass on feedback, both positive and negative, to the contractors.

Q. How does your business fluctuate with the seasons?

A. Typically, my busy time is February to October. The rest of the year is normally slower, but there is always a homeowner or business that needs something done. Winter is a great time to plan projects and have professionally designed plans ready to go by spring.

Q. What are the challenges/advantages to running a small business?

A. I operate my business from home. The advantage to owning any business is that you get out of it what you put into it. I set goals and challenge myself every day. I have plenty of flexibility but also know my priorities.

I find that trying to separate the business from family time can be challenging. There comes a time each day when you have to say, "It's time to quit work and go home," even though home is in the next room.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Know of a small business that would make an interesting profile? E-mail us at lakes@pressherald.com or contact News Clerk Betsy Ring McMahon at 791-6307.