

4TH ANNUAL FIREFIGHTERS OF NORTHEAST WISCONSIN

Our 2014 initiative features the largest field ever
of business owners searching for help with their growth

Story by Sean Fitzgerald, New North B2B publisher

Emerging from a recessionary period in which businesses come and go, those businesses that survive often need to readjust their business plans in order to grow once again and manage that growth effectively.

That's the case for each of the three businesses this year in our fourth annual Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin initiative aimed at helping small business owners put out the fires within their organizations so that they can focus on growing the bottom line. Each of the three business owners this year – selected from a field of businesses who submitted nominations during the past three months – identified a desire to work more prominently on their business than spending time regularly as technicians within their business.

For the next five months, they'll each be paired up with three of the region's leading business consultants for an intensive course of work at no cost. In return, they'll share with B2B readers the challenges their business faces, the lessons they'll learn while working with their consultant, and how they plan to implement those lessons into their operations. It's our hope that readers facing similar issues within their own businesses will learn from their journey and make improvements to their own operations.

For the next few months in B2B, we'll provide an update of the progress of each business's work along with their consultant, ultimately wrapping up the program

in September with a capstone article highlighting the transformations each has made along the way.

The hope is that each business will be better positioned to execute their growth strategies, but even learning a change in direction can be an important step forward. In past Firefighter initiatives in recent years, B2B readers will recall one business in which the two partners amicably separated into two distinct operations, another which shed some of its less profitable revenue streams in favor of focusing more attentively on those profit centers poised for growth.

We plan for the 2014 installment of Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin to prove equally successful.

The Consultants

GARY VAUGHAN

Owner of Guident Business Solutions,
Appleton
www.guidentbusinesssolutions.com



Vaughan launched Guident in 2009 after spending his entire career teaching – both in the classroom and in business. Having previously spent many years as a business

owner himself, Vaughan realized many business owners lacked fundamental skills such as understanding financials, human resource practices and management skills, as examples. His firm's proprietary Guident 360 Assessment Program enables business owners to holistically address their business needs.

Vaughan has professional experience in a variety of industries, including retail, petroleum, manufacturing and academics. He is a senior adjunct instructor for Concordia University of Wisconsin and a lecturer in economics and entrepreneurship at Lawrence University in Appleton.

BARBARA JORDAN

Owner of AdvantEdge Success Coaching,
Green Bay
www.advantedgesuccesscoaching.com



Jordan started AdvantEdge in 2000 following a career in behavioral health and human services. An experienced leadership coach and human resources consultant and trainer, Jordan

authored Leadership Success in Spite of Stress in 2010 to help readers and her clients balance hectic professional schedules with fulfilling personal and family lives.

Through her practice, Jordan coaches her business clients to be more effective leaders within their own organizations so that they become more productive with less stress and fewer obstacles in their paths.

Jordan is also an adjunct instructor for Concordia University of Wisconsin and has mentored other business owners through SCORE.

JON WRIGHT

Owner of Wright Advisor,
Appleton
www.wrightadvisor.com



Wright launched his own consulting firm in 2011 after a successful corporate marketing career spanning more than three decades. His background includes 17 years as a marketing

executive with Kimberly-Clark Corp. in Neenah and six years with Green Bay-based Enzymatic Therapy, where he helped execute and transition the sale of the nutritional supplement distributor.

Wright works with clients to develop a future vision and direction for their business, ultimately helping them hone in their market audience and identify their unique selling proposition.

Wright also volunteers as a mentor through New North's Fast Forward initiative, a program to assist promising start ups position themselves to obtain outside investment capital to advance into a second-stage firm.

The consultants

Aiding in the cause to help out our three business owners, B2B sought out the firefighting expertise of three leading business consultants from northeast Wisconsin.

Veteran firefighter Gary Vaughan, president and owner of Appleton-based Guident Business Solutions, is embarking on his fourth year helping entrepreneurs get out of a rut through B2B's firefighters initiative. A seasoned business owner himself, Vaughan regularly works with his existing portfolio of clients to improve their financial outlook by gradually building owner equity in the business. He firmly believes business owners must be stewards of their financial reports, using balance sheets, profit and loss statements and cash flow statements as a dashboard for driving the business forward.

Through his own practice, Guident Business Solutions works with its clients to ensure they're inputting the most accurate and up-to-date financial information they have into their accounting software so that their financial reports don't lead them off course.

"Everything in a business ultimately boils down to a financial decision. That's how we perceive it," Vaughan said.

AdvantEdge Success Coaching owner Barbara Jordan is in her first year in B2B's Firefighters program. But the experienced leadership coach and human resources consultant has been working with clients through her Green Bay-based firm for nearly 14 years.

Jordan started AdvantEdge in 2000 following a career in behavioral health and human services. An experienced leadership coach and human resources consultant and trainer, Jordan authored Leadership Success in Spite of Stress in 2010 to help readers and her clients balance hectic professional schedules with fulfilling personal and family lives.

Through her practice, Jordan coaches her business clients to be more effective leaders within their own organizations so that they become more productive with less stress, and their employees are better able to do the same as well.

"These days you cannot afford to keep leaders who diminish

Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin

employee morale, destroy their productivity, and drain their time and energy,” Jordan wrote in a recent post to her blog. “Leaders must deal with their employees carefully and compassionately.”

Our third and final consultant, Jon Wright of Appleton-based Wright Advisor, is also a first-time firefighter through B2B’s initiative. Wright is an experienced marketer whose career background includes 17 years as a marketing executive with Kimberly-Clark Corp. in Neenah and six years with Green Bay-based Enzymatic Therapy, where he helped execute and transition the acquisition by Schwabe North America. He also volunteers as a mentor through New North’s Fast Forward initiative, a program to assist promising start ups position themselves to obtain outside investment capital to advance into a second-stage firm.

Wright works with clients through his 3-year-old consulting firm to hone in on their market audience and identify their unique selling proposition. Wright helps businesses better understand the importance of positioning their product or service within a competitive marketplace.

“Part of the problem with new entrepreneurs is that they start off as technicians within the business,” Wright said. As many of these entrepreneurs grow past start-up and settle into potential growth mode, he said many fail to refine their marketing to identify their key audience, as well as effectively hiring others to work in the business while the owner focuses

their attention on the business.

Wisconsin Swim Academy LLC - Appleton

Known as Fox Cities Swim Academy until a name change this month, the 4-year-old swim school based in Appleton has been bursting at the seams during the past six months. Owner and founder Susie Van Ekeren said her swim school has doubled in size during the past eight months, having increased from teaching 75 students in a given week three years ago to nearly 250 per week today, occasionally having to place prospective students on a waiting list until a spot opens.

Van Ekeren eagerly anticipates the growth to come, but is already recognizing some of the fires that accompany such quick growth, and is looking ahead to substantial investments that may be needed in order to sustain her growth for the long



COMPANY: WISCONSIN SWIM ACADEMY LLC

LOCATION: APPLETON

OWNER: SUSIE VAN EKEREN

FOUNDED: 2010

EMPLOYEES: NINE PART TIME

WEB: NONE



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term, including the possibility of building a dedicated facility with an indoor swimming pool.

A lifelong swimming enthusiast with a degree in marketing, Van Ekeren previously taught swim lessons at Swimtastic in the Fox Cities for a year until being promoted to manage the franchise, a role she held for five years. During that time, the corporate owners asked Van Ekeren and her husband, Jeff – a commercial lender with Horicon Bank in Appleton – to acquire the franchise. They considered the opportunity, but ultimately declined and Van Ekeren eventually left to focus fulltime on raising their four boys.

Having installed an above-ground swimming pool at their home in 2008 for their boys to enjoy during the summer, a handful of the family's friends sought out Van Ekeren to teach their own children to swim, being familiar with her background as a swim instructor. As word of mouth spread, Van Ekeren eventually incorporated Fox Cities Swim Academy LLC in 2010, and was teaching 70 students a week through a partnership with a local hotel to use its indoor swimming pool, in which she negotiated a rental rate per student visit. She was dedicated to teaching no more than two students at a time during a lesson, a policy she continues to maintain today.

"Growing to over 70 students by the second full year had me in the water many hours a week," Van Ekeren said.

As Van Ekeren approached 75 students and a waiting list of no less than 25 kids, she hired an instructor at the end of 2012 to explore expansion of students and those additional spots filled immediately.

Throughout 2013 and into this year, she continued to expand and began hiring more instructors. By the end of 2013, the number of students in any one session grew to nearly 200 unique students per week. The swim school currently has nine instructors, with Van Ekeren spending about 30 hours in the pool herself each week while managing the scheduling, payroll and admission of new students through her home office. More instructors are being hired and trained, and she's currently using two hotel swimming pools to accommodate the number of swim lessons the academy provides.

Van Ekeren is currently learning to use financial software, and said she needs to fine tune her budgeting and forecasting. Finding efficient processes for scheduling is a priority, but a challenge, Van Ekeren said. And developing brand and marketing plans are important this year.

She recently hired a part-time office assistant – and with more than \$17,000 a year in facility rental costs to use area hotel swimming pools – ultimately wonders if building a facility will lay the foundation for a much bigger and more complicated business.

"It's also a major financial step for myself and my family," she said.

Van Ekeren hopes Gary Vaughan and his team from Guident Business Solutions can help effectively steer her growth.

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Elite Security Solutions - Oshkosh

After nearly two decades in business, David Cihlar has built a rather successful endeavor through his two businesses, Elite Security Solutions and Wisconsin Process Service.

A former law enforcement officer during the 1980s, Cihlar was forced to leave the career he loved when a back injury forced him into early retirement in his late twenties. Searching for a new vocation, Cihlar started a new career in the insurance industry as a claims supervisor while also working for a security company on the side, all the while recognizing that he someday planned to open a private investigation service.

After five years in insurance and recently married, Cihlar found himself without a job the day he returned from his honeymoon with his wife – his employer closed its doors the day before his wedding, and since he was already gone, didn't want to disrupt his big day by letting him know until he returned.



COMPANY: ELITE SECURITY SOLUTIONS

LOCATION: OSHKOSH

OWNER: DAVID CIHLAR

FOUNDED: 1995

EMPLOYEES: 36 PART TIME

WEB: WWW.WISCONSINSECURITY.US



"That day I told my wife, 'Honey, those plans for starting a business are happening today,'" Cihlar said of the April 1995 birth of his business. Cihlar started out doing private investigation for corporations looking to crack down on employee theft and insurance companies hunting down policyholder abuse on claims. He also served legal papers to individuals being sued in court.

While often working security for various providers on the side, Cihlar branched out to provide facility and event security a few

"Everything in a business ultimately boils down to a financial decision. That's how we perceive it."

*Gary Vaughan, president/owner
Guident Business Solutions*

years later. That part of the business has grown considerably, currently boasting a roster of 36 employees, but had been as high as 80 a few years ago, servicing large events such as the Iola Old Car Show and Brat Days in Sheboygan.

"The event side just started taking off about 10 years ago and has been growing like crazy since then," Cihlar said, admitting that he continues to do all of the scheduling himself. His assistant director of security has been with Elite Security for the past six years, yet Cihlar still has his reasons for assigning security teams himself, matching personalities with one another and what the demands of the event will require.

"He (the assistant director of security) could probably do shift approvals. It's just something I haven't let go of, yet," Cihlar said. "A couple of years ago I tried to step back and let the (four) supervisors handle more. It didn't go the best."

Cihlar recognizes he needs to receive a higher performance from his staff while providing security for his clients' events. He has high personal standards for customer service, but noted that he doesn't feel as if that same standard is carried through by the entirety of his staff.

Elite Security also recently lost its office manager of six years, a position Cihlar is looking to replace with someone willing to assume greater responsibility for marketing the organization's services via social media and more effectively responding to inquiries from prospective clients. He said he needs help encouraging his staff to take more responsibility themselves, and for communicating those expectations and managing

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“From a leadership standpoint, how do I get the staff on board to do more than the minimum,” Cihlar said. “There’s times I’d like to be out doing sales and building the business, but I can’t do that if I’m serving papers or doing a security install.”

Finally, Cihlar noted his business is so diverse, it’s difficult to market effectively. The security side of his business also sells business and residential security systems, as well as retails various products such as pepper spray and stun guns. The process serving side of the business also includes repossessing vehicles and hunting down individuals sought by law enforcement.

Cihlar recognizes there’s still substantial opportunity for growth of his businesses, and is hoping Barbara Jordan of AdvantEdge Success Coaching can help enhance his leadership style and equip him with the tools and skills to put out the fires within his organization.

9th St. Wellness Center – Green Bay

Karen Stoehr had a divine intervention three years ago which lead her to purchase a building in Green Bay and bring together more than 25 practitioners of alternative medicine under one roof.

Today, her 9th St. Wellness Center in Green Bay serves as a cooperative of sorts for wellness and life coaches, massage

COMPANY: 9TH ST. WELLNESS CENTER

LOCATION: GREEN BAY

OWNER: KAREN STOEHR

FOUNDED: 2011

EMPLOYEES: NONE

WEB: WWW.9THSTWELLNESSCENTER.COM



therapists, yoga and tai chi instructors, reflexologists, hypnotherapists and reiki practitioners, among other disciplines. The practitioners themselves are their own business, and simply rent out the space they use in Stoehr’s building for \$10 per patient session. Stoehr additionally services the practitioners in her building by taking phone calls, scheduling appointments, and greeting patients when they enter the front door.

A cancer survivor who found comfort in her recovery through various nontraditional forms of medical therapy, Stoehr aims to expose the Greater Green Bay community to as many healing arts as possible as well as to create an environment where all practitioners work together to find what is best for the patient.

“Most people know the (traditional) medical field,” Stoehr

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said. "But this is an alternative."

Stoehr has struggled to develop a consistent, effective marketing plan to promote the wellness center. She admits to not having spent much money on marketing, rather opting to network, join a referral group, take advantage of a handful of no-cost placements in newsletters and rely upon word-of-mouth promotion. After striking up a partnership last year with Coffee News owner and publisher Bev Van Lieshout, the two have been promoting 9th St. Wellness Center through the weekly publication distributed at restaurants throughout the Green Bay area.

Looking ahead, both Stoehr and Van Lieshout hope to instigate change in the manner that wellness is perceived – particularly among adolescents at a time in their lives when they're learning health behaviors that could set the tone for their entire lives. The two are embarking on developing a course of programs promoting eight separate dimensions of wellness, including physical, emotional and spiritual wellness.

"(Children aged 10 to 16) are at the point where they're starting to have issues (with various areas of behavioral development), and they don't know where to turn," Stoehr said.

This initiative will include various courses that will be taught on site at the Wellness Center by some of its practitioners beginning in June, when school is out for the summer.

Stoehr is looking for assistance marketing both the 9th St. Wellness center as a whole as well as promoting her upcoming program of courses in wellness. She'll be working with Jon Wright to identify her unique selling proposition and develop a sound marketing plan that she can put in motion later this year.

"I know what it means to put out fires on a daily basis just like my husband did for 32 years with the Green Bay Fire Department," Stoehr said. ■

24

NUMBER

The percent drop of federal spending in Wisconsin from \$3.98 billion in 2012 to an estimated \$3.02 billion in 2013. The total amount of federal spending in Wisconsin during 2011 was \$7.20 billion.

Source: Wisconsin Procurement Institute

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Don't Let the Media Control Your Future

By Susan Porath of **Navigator Planning Group**

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It's understandable that investors, with the help of a necessarily short-term-focused media, will tend to focus most of

their attention on what has happened in financial markets in the past month, week, day, or even hour. When stocks have fallen heavily in price, for instance, this is routinely reported as, "More bad news for investors today..." In fact, unless you plan to liquidate your portfolio that particular day, it is unlikely to be bad news at all. The media could just as easily say, "Stocks went on sale today, as falling prices offered investors higher expected returns..." If you are a long-term investor, the key issue is how your portfolio performs from now on, not

what happened yesterday.

Another assumption the financial media makes is that the future is the same for everyone. In reality, of course, our futures differ depending on our age, family circumstances, jobs, incomes, and other factors. One person may be focused on paying for a college education for their children or caring for aging parents. Another may be looking toward buying a home, saving for a vacation or changing careers. Everyone's future is different, which means the investment strategy each of us adopts will vary. Some will want a strategy that delivers regular income; others will be more focused on growth. Some will be risk takers, others risk-averse.

None of us can control the future. Risk can be quantified up to a point, but

risks can vary greatly depending on the individual. So while we can't control the future, we can control the structure of our portfolios, we can ensure we are broadly diversified, we can manage fees and taxes, and we can regularly rebalance to ensure the risk allocation stays within our chosen parameters.

Yes, the future is unknowable. While we cannot prepare the future for our portfolios, we can still strive to prepare our portfolios for the future. Our role as qualified financial advisors is to help connect each individual's circumstances and needs to their goals. We are "Invested In You."

Susan Porath is a financial advisor with Navigator Planning Group and can be reached by email at sporath@navigatorpg.com or phone 920.406.8500.



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