



Column Title: Employee Takes Over Part of Henri's
Green Bay Press Gazette Sept. 2, 2010 Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

One of the Green Bay SCORE counselors got in touch with me recently. John McCully, a longtime counselor, had met with Jim Widiger, a former piano instructor at Henri's Music. Along with counselor Mary Lynn Seidl, McCully was impressed with Widiger's business ideas.

Widiger had taught at Henri's for 10 years when he got the news that the store would be closing. Rather than seeing it as the end of the road, Widiger made the best of the situation and saw the possibilities. He started working on a plan to purchase the piano portion of the business. Widiger met with SCORE to make certain that he was on track.

McCully noted, "Jim probably had the best game plan for starting his own business that I've seen. It included three levels of potential revenue and was extremely well thought out."

For his part, Widiger found the business plan challenging. "I learned that a great deal of information had to be compiled in order to put together an effective plan," he said. That included extensive marketing and product research. He had to evaluate what parts of the former business would be worth pursuing.

In doing the analysis, Widiger talked to the lender in charge of the liquidation, the primary piano vendor, and the property landlord. While he liked the quality music and instruments that Henri's was known for, he didn't enter into the bidding process to purchase the name because he would have had to agree not to hire any Henri's employees for a period of one year.

"I chose the part of the business that I was familiar with," Widiger explained. "I saw areas that I could improve on by keeping the business smaller and tighter to increase profitability."

The new store, Piano Galleries of Wisconsin, opened a few weeks ago in part of the space that was occupied by Henri's. Because so much of the business is unique, Widiger says that despite its seeds, it is basically a start-up. He will be using the primary vendor, Kawai America, but he also plans to add one other line.

"The previous inventory was all sold in the liquidation sale. I bought all new inventory so everything is fresh," Widiger said.

He plans to have four employees, and will offer lessons in addition to selling pianos, related items, and sheet music. A grand opening is planned for November with a soft opening currently in process. This interim period will provide him with the opportunity to fine tune the business and capitalize on what he considers one of his greatest strengths as an owner.

Widiger stated, “Some owners ignore what their employees have to say. I consider my employees very competent and am willing to listen to any of their ideas. By using those ideas and having a better product and competitive prices, I am confident that the business will prosper.”

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