



Staten Island Advance

Islanders on new career paths after Sept. 11

Tragedy caused some to reevaluate how they earn their living, and prompted a wish to work near home

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- In the immediate aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack, data-center bank executive Michael Rose was relocated from his office near the World Trade Center to another lower-Manhattan location, where he worked for nearly a week before returning home to his family in Tottenville.

The violent destruction and tragic loss of life, which he witnessed about a week after his 44th birthday, were to make him rethink his priorities and set him on a new career path as a small-business owner.

"I was a vice president at the Bank of New York for 23 years in charge of the data-center operation and disaster recovery," said the father of two daughters. "At the time, disaster-recovery consisted of planning for power failures, floods or some other natural disaster -- not a terrorist attack."

His office was located at 101 Barclay St., a building adjacent to 7 World Trade Center, which collapsed from damages sustained in the attack.

"The collapse of 7 World Trade Center basically blew out every window in our building," said Rose, who with a co-worker spent five days working on the recovery of the bank's data systems from another downtown office, and the next 18 months establishing three new data centers.

Feeling "burnt out" upon concluding his assignment, Rose decided to trade in his role as a high-paid bank executive for that of a small-business owner with his wife, Sophie, a registered nurse.

In April 2005, the couple opened a Ladies Workout Express franchise in Richmond Valley, about a mile from where they reside.

A COMFORT ZONE

For Rose, the business has become "a comfort zone" near to his home and family.

"I went from making a salary in the high six figures, and I'm happier than I ever was," Rose said.

Many of the women that joined the 30-minute circuit-training facility also experienced the horror of witnessing the terrorist attack first-hand, "or had a loved one affected or, even worst, lost someone," Rose said. "My wife and I wanted to create a place where these ladies could come and feel good again."

The tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001, has caused some Staten Islanders to reevaluate how they earn their living, and prompted a desire to work closer to home.

Not unlike Rose, Oakwood residents Anthony and Kathleen Donadio were seeking a comfort zone in 2003 when they sold The New Heritage Limousine Co., the West Brighton-based business they founded in 1993, and established a new, less-demanding venture near their second home at the Jersey Shore.

"We were looking for a life change -- to live in and work in a less-crowded area with potential for growth," said Mrs. Donadio, who with her husband launched a triple-franchise operation in Tuckerton, N.J., which borders on their home community of Little Egg Harbor.

Their store, Carvel, Cinnabon and The Coffee Beanery, caters mostly to families, said Mrs. Donadio, whose

two daughters also work in the shop.

The desire for change was prompted by a combination of reasons, among them being that all five of Mrs. Donadio's sisters, although OK, were employed in lower Manhattan at the time of the attack.

"One of my sisters worked in the Trade Center, but she was late for her bus that day," Mrs. Donadio said.

With loved ones in the forefront of the couple's thoughts, "We wanted to spend more time with our children," Mrs. Donadio said.

The limousine company, she said was a "24/7 operation," demanding that she or her husband be in the office answering phones, booking jobs or meeting with clients, and being on call at all times.

The decline in business in the wake of the World Trade Center attack made the couple realize how much their business depended upon Manhattan "because the bulk of our work consisted of going in and out of the city," Mrs. Donadio said.

FINANCIAL AID

Although the limo company kept busy with jobs less-dependent on Manhattan, revenues were so strained in the months following the attack, that the Donadios applied for and received federal disaster aid with the assistance of the Small Business Development Center at the College of Staten Island.

"It wasn't that we were shut down, but we were kind of limping along," Mrs. Donadio explained.

Although things eventually improved, "when an opportunity arose to sell the business, we seriously considered the offer, said Mrs. Donadio, whose husband was nearing his retirement as a sergeant with the New York City Police Department, and whose three children now are 16, 19 and 20 years of age.

Now, she and her husband are enjoying "a different way of life," Mrs. Donadio said. "It's slower paced and the hours are more controllable. ... And we still have the personal satisfaction of owning our own business."

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