



# How to succeed in business DOWNTOWN

By Laura Brandon  
Contributing writer

**Empty storefronts are a bummer. They create dark, dingy, sketchy stretches of streetscape that contribute to the perception that downtown Syracuse is somehow unclean, unsafe and uncool. Nearly a quarter of the more than 260 people who took the CNYSpeaks survey pointed to one or more of those factors as the primary reason they don't come downtown more often.**

**Meanwhile, 27 percent of the survey takers said they would come to the city center more often if it**

**had more retail shops, and another 25 percent said they would come downtown more often if it had more restaurants.**

**So we asked three business owners who have found success downtown — despite the perceived issues with parking and crime — what they think it takes to run a successful business downtown. We also asked five citizens what new business they would most want to see open.**

**Here's what they had to say.**

**Razzbarry**  
181 Walton St.  
Open for 14 years



Michelle Gabel / The Post-Standard, 2004

**Theresa Barry, owner**

**1.** "Offer a unique product. People don't want to see the same old thing that they've seen in other stores or online. You need to have a unique, constantly changing inventory for them to keep coming back to your shop. People often express amazement at the variety of weird things they find at Razzbarry."

**2.** "A good location is very important. You have to have a great deal of foot traffic with a shop like Razzbarry."

**3.** "Good customer service. You have to be friendly, polite and helpful to your customers. It's such a small shop that I actually get to know the regulars a bit, which is great."

**4.** "Have a pleasant atmosphere. A boutique is not just about the merchandise on the shelves—it is about the whole experience. At Razzbarry we pay attention to all the details, such as music, display, signage. Even the layout of the shop is carefully set up. We really want people to enjoy themselves here."

**5.** "Be ready for highs and lows. Sometimes the money comes in, sometimes it doesn't. Plan well for those times when cash flow is low."

**The Sound Garden**  
124 Walton St.  
Open for 11 years



Michelle Gabel / The Post-Standard

**Bryan Burkert, owner (not shown)**

**1.** "You have to spend a good amount of money on marketing to reach people. It is hard to advertise in Syracuse because people are so spread out, so you have to make an investment to attract as many people as possible to your business."

**2.** "Find a product people are looking for that is not already readily available in Syracuse."

**3.** "Especially with the current economy, people in Syracuse need to find value in your product. Price means something. We have worked really hard to keep low prices and great selection."

**4.** "You have to keep evolving and changing with the times. This has been especially important in the music business."

**5.** "It is important to cater to the customers' needs. Listen to your customers and don't be afraid to make adjustments when needed."

**Pastabilities**  
311 S. Franklin St.  
Open for 26 years



Frank Ordoñez / The Post-Standard, 2007

**Karyn Korteling, owner**

**1.** "In a small market like Syracuse, it is very risky to specialize a lot. We didn't want to over-specialize because we wanted to appeal to all ages and all budgets. In Syracuse, it is important to make sure you appeal to a broad enough market in order to have success."

**2.** "Keep it fresh, different and current. But at the same time, it is important to avoid flash-in-the-pan trends and maintain a reliable product that people can count on."

**3.** "Be creative. We tried to do something familiar but different. I am attracted to businesses that strive to do something great but put their own mark on it."

**4.** "Love what you do because it will take a lot of hard work to be successful."

**5.** "Don't ignore the market. We tried to make something unique and different enough that people will come. If there are a bunch of pizza places in the area, don't try to start a pizza place."

## WHAT CITIZENS WANT DOWNTOWN



“There should be more entertainment—music and dancing. ... A Spanish restaurant would be great.”

— Luther Edwards, 21, Syracuse



“... I'd like to see more diverse and posh restaurants, like more Asian food, and I don't see any Indian places downtown.”

— Alex Hur, 26, Syracuse



“There should be a grocery store, but it should be less high-end.”

— Chris Perrine, 37, Homer



“I would like to see more authentic restaurants and more museums...”

— Melissa Nogrask, 33, Cicero



“A book store would be good. Also, a liquor store, so I could pick up a bottle of wine..”

— Leanne Galster, 48, North Syracuse

## ATTEND A FORUM

The conversation about downtown is already under way at [blog.syracuse.com/cny-speaks](http://blog.syracuse.com/cny-speaks). Log on and tell us what you think.

We have scheduled three forums to discuss issues, identified by the citizens of Central New York, that need to be tackled for downtown to become a vibrant hub of activity. Sign up now to ensure

we have a space for you by contacting Greg Munno at 470-6084 or [gmunno@syracuse.com](mailto:gmunno@syracuse.com). The forums are:

- 6 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 2, at the Hotel Syracuse, 500 S.

Warren St.

- 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5, at the Warehouse, 350 W. Fayette St.
- 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 7, City Hall Commons, 201 E. Washington St.

# Original owner sold his violin for \$50

ORIGINAL, FROM PAGE B-1  
Lake Park.

Ray DiPietro was a kid of about 10 in the early 1940s, when he began to really get to know Leonard Rubensky, who was old and infirm by then. Leonard ran a small shoe and radio repair shop at 412 Butternut St. The DiPietros were his next-door neighbors.

“I grew up across the street from Haberle’s,” Ray’s saying of the brewers of Congress beer. He’s retired as a heating and plumbing contractor and is recovering at home just now from hip surgery.

He’s owned the violin — which apparently was made in France in 1902 — since Leonard Rubensky sold it to him for \$50 more than 50 years ago.

“I was very pleased to have it,” he says.

Ray said his friend was a slight man who walked with two canes when he knew him. He always puffed on a pipe. He last saw him when Ray got married and moved to Kirkville.

“He used to sit on that couch in the back of his store and play the violin and tell stories,” Ray recalls. “I wish I paid better attention, but I was just a kid. I probably lost a lot of the stories.”

Ray says he’s never played the violin but wishes he could. He actually took a few violin lessons at Franklin School before he caught typhoid fever and had to drop out for six weeks.

“When I got out of the hospital, it was the end of the school year,” he said. “When I moved from Butternut Street, I lost track of Leonard.”

He says he’d be hypnotized by the stories Leonard told him about his life on the canal. Leonard also taught him a lot about fixing radios.

“I used to load and fire up the



David Lassman / The Post-Standard

**STEVE CARACCILO**, operations manager at the Erie Canal Museum in Syracuse, holds a violin that the original owner played after coming into the city on the Oswego Canal, according to the donor, Ray DiPietro.

stove in the store and shovel his sidewalk in the winter,” he says.

One of Ray’s pals back then was Joe Riposo, the Syracuse jazz player, composer and teacher. “He always wanted to be a musician and that’s what he is,” Ray remarked.

Ray has gained fame in recent years as the so-called psychic plumber. He makes weather predictions based on his dreams.

Ray worked as a teen at Mirbach’s, the well-known restaurant at 419 Butternut St. “I made sauerbraten, among other things,” he recalled. “Imagine that, an Italian kid making German food.”

Ray says he treasures the time he spent with Leonard Rubensky. “He was a terrific old man,” he says. “He meant what he said.”

He’s pleased that the Erie Canal Museum accepted his gift. “This is a piece of history that couldn’t be lost,” he says.

Dick Case’s column will return Sept. 30.

# Students find creative ways to pay for school

STUDENTS, FROM PAGE B-1

vention to keep kids in college, said Virginia Donohue, On Point’s executive director.

“I think because the price of everything is going up, the families are struggling much more to come up with that deposit,” she said. “Even if they are getting grants and loans, if they can’t come up with the last \$250, then college just slips away from them.”

No college in the region reported that enrollment had dropped because students couldn’t pay their bills, but sometimes students are being more creative.

Students who commute are looking to save gas by consolidating their class schedules and taking only Tuesday/Thursday or Monday/Wednesday/Friday courses, said Pam Freeman, speaking for Cayuga Community College.

Students have kept financial aid offices busy. SU’s had 4,500 student visits this summer, 20 percent more than last year, and fielded questions constantly.

“They counted 40,000 phone calls or e-mails,” said Don Saleh, SU’s vice president for enrollment management. “That’s a staggering number.”

For students and their families, this has been a particularly confusing year because of changes in the student loan market. Some banks stopped offering loans and students had to scramble to find other banks. The federal government also raised the amount students could borrow through the Stafford loan program. However, the addition-

al \$2,000 per year loans are unsubsidized, which means interest is charged right away, rather than deferred until after graduation.

“We’re seeing the students are taking that money,” Pagano said. “They are accepting it without question.”

While loans are often the only option for families in financial crisis, some private colleges have found additional grant money for families appealing for more aid. SU added another \$1.5 million to its \$120 million budget for need-based financial aid.

With more families shouldering more student loans, Pagano said she’s noticing a new problem: Families putting several children through college are having trouble getting loan approval.

“I had one family where they had almost \$600 a month that they were already paying in educational loans for other children,” she said. “Now with this last child, they can’t take out any more.”

Pagano worked with the family so that their financial picture reflected the loan payments and they qualified for the government’s Pell Grant program.

Counselors often tell students to try and cover some expenses, such as books, by getting jobs, rather than rolling those costs into more loans. At Oswego State, many students already graduate with more than \$20,000 in debt, Pagano said.

This year, she said, counselors have a new favorite quote: “Do you want to live like a student now or live like a student for the rest of your life?”

## Seeking financial aid

**More demand:** In New York state, the number of students filing for federal financial aid in the first half of the year was up 12 percent. Onondaga Community College had 16 percent more financial aid applications this year and Cayuga Community College had 10 percent more.

**Pell Grants:** Applications have increased — by 800,000 nationally in the past year, according to a New York Times report. The Bush administration is now warning that Pell, the major federal financial aid program, may need a \$6 billion bailout from taxpayers.

**How much does college cost?** It varies from school to school. One year, including tuition, fees, room and board, is about \$45,000 at Syracuse University and \$11,700 at Onondaga Community College. Most families get some financial aid.

**Want to know more?** When looking for financial aid information on the Web, beware of lookalike sites for private companies. Here’s the online gateway for the U.S. Department of Education: [studentaid.ed.gov](http://studentaid.ed.gov).

# JUST FOR LAUGHS, LET’S DANCE, JAWOHL!

A LINE forms on the dance floor Saturday as the Enzian Bavarian Band entertains at the annual Oktoberfest on Clinton Square in Syracuse. Enjoying the music are (from left) Nancy Dortzback, of Lakeport; Ruth Joyce, of Minoa; Menzo King, of Syracuse; Sally Frenza, of Baldwinsville; Melissa Hoch, of Syracuse; and Brigitte Niebuhr, of Syracuse.



Lauren Long / The Post-Standard

PHOTOS ON [syracuse.com](http://syracuse.com)

For a gallery of photos from Saturday’s Oktoberfest activities go to [www.syracuse.com/photos/cny](http://www.syracuse.com/photos/cny).