

Strength in Numbers

By: Denise Lane

2006 marks my 20th year in Los Alamos as a small business owner. I am also the owner of Central Avenue Plaza. Time flies, our lives change, and we often fail to take time to reflect on our accomplishments. Instead we tend to focus on what we have yet to achieve. Our community operates in much the same way. We focus on what we have not done, our failures and our mistakes, rather than our accomplishments and our strengths. There is, however, value in assessing our successes. It builds confidence to share the future that awaits us.

While doing my annual filing of the many piles that have accumulated in my office, I came across a copy of an appraisal done on my building in 1987. <Inset picture with caption.>

It is hard to imagine this vibrant busy building once housed just two businesses. The old Anthony's department store and the Los Alamos Drug Store. I have fond memories of LA Drug, stopping in to see John Gunther dispensing prescriptions along with funny stories. The candy racks at the front of the store were always a favorite with my children. The cosmetics counter was a wonderland. But, John retired and the business changed hands. Health care changed and so did the viability of a small town drug store. The internet and box retail changed the way that people shop and so went the department store as well.

We remodeled the building to create room for seven new businesses. At the same time, Dave Fox undertook the remodel of his building and downtown had the new face we see today.

Fast forward to 2006. One afternoon last week, I sat in Starbucks with my friend and fellow restaurateur, Min Park. We were sharing ideas for our vision of our businesses and brainstorming on how to best meet the desires of our patrons. You might find it surprising that two competitors would swap ideas and advice. However, we see it differently. We see the mutual success of downtown businesses as a benefit to our individual businesses. More retail, more offices, more restaurants equates to more people downtown.

The best new addition to downtown has been the office building that Tom and Maryanne Netuschil built to house LANL employees. Those employees support downtown businesses. They are customers that fill the shops and restaurants. Customers are the essential fuel for our businesses to prosper and grow.

The Central Avenue Plaza today is the home of seven prospering businesses that benefit from the success of the others and fill the parking lots to capacity.

Starbucks is busy most any time of the day. I am very proud of my accomplishment of securing Starbucks as a tenant. Starbuck's has become a gathering place for our town. Stop in and you will see some one you know! People of all ages, socializing, doing business, studying, debating, lobbying, you name it, it happens at Starbucks.

Min Park has created a great gathering place at the Central Avenue Grill, packed most days with the lunch crowd eager for Chef Phillip's eclectic menu and specials. Or

stroll in on an evening and hear live music, couples sharing a romantic dinner over a bottle of wine, families celebrating birthdays, business travelers dining after a long day. Or perhaps it's late Friday night and Min has turned his place into a Teen dance club filled with young people.

Ruby Alexander and Kelly Parker have opened Ruby K's filled with the smells of fresh bagels and artisan breads. The place is bright and cheerful and you can just feel the love these two young women from White Rock have poured into that business. So much so, that we are working on an expansion plan for their business.

Margaret Ansel and Rick Reiss have a very successful mortgage brokerage at Intermountain Mortgage, working in a friendly office that helps put people in new homes every day.

Barbara Barnes is at the helm of Central Title, providing seamless closing services to many happy homebuyers.

Xerox houses a service center so that all of those temperamental copiers continue to hum as we go about our business and we don't have to wait for them to drive up from Santa Fe or Albuquerque.

Jim and Dawn Cline crank out printing job after printing job at Aspen Copies, working miracles for those last minute deadlines that everyone seems to have.

You only need to look next door to see the great business the Fox family, Dave, Anne and Andy have created.

Same goes for the elegant Bella Cosa Flowers owned by Mary Beth Maasen and Karen Hawkins.

Our downtown is a mix of home grown and national businesses. Every new worker housed downtown helps each of those businesses and creates opportunities for us to grow more. More businesses and people mean more reasons to provide places to shop, eat, and conduct business.

More local business means more gross receipts tax, more jobs, more sponsors for Little League, local non-profits, and local families making a living and contributing to our community.

The new downtown plan adopted by the County Council creates a palette to take the next step with our downtown. Mixed uses and housing, shared parking and parking structures, and downtown tenancy by LANL, will allow us to create even more choices for our customers and more opportunities for growth of our business community. I can't wait for the next 20 years. We have some success that we should be proud of and we certainly have a bright future!

You can find out more about LACDC and our positions on key economic issues including "Increase Retail/Entertainment Opportunity" on the web at www.losalamos.org/lacdc -- Kevin Holsapple, Executive Director, LACDC at kevin@losalamos.org. For more information.