

West Valley VIEW

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Business Briefcase: March 29, 2011

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This column passes on West Valley business items that may not have the volume of a full story, but which are of enough interest to warrant telling you about. Instead of just carrying them around, I share them with you from my "business briefcase."

Hello, everyone and welcome to the Business Briefcase. Yes, just the Business Briefcase. We had no bites on last week's naming rights. Just like most of you small business owners out there, Mr. Briefcase will have to find another way to supplement his income.

On to business, and first up is a 12-year-old Buckeye dance studio that recently expanded into Goodyear.

Desert West Dance Academy started classes March 14 at 15671 W. Roosevelt St., Suite 150, in Goodyear. The new location is just south of Interstate 10 on the west side of Estrella Parkway. The studio's original location in Buckeye is at 303 N. Fourth St., a little north of Monroe Avenue.

Desert West is owned by three women who met while members of the University of Arizona's pom line in 1991: Rende Combs, Amy Standifer and Geri Parker. And one of their Buckeye students, Lara Benbow, has followed in their footsteps and is a freshman on the UofA pom line.

Combs' family has farmed in Buckeye for quite a while as she grew up in town, graduating from Buckeye Union High School before heading to Tucson for college. She currently lives in town with her own family as she left her day-time career in Phoenix behind to concentrate full time on her children and the dance studio.

Desert West began after a long-time Buckeye dance instructor retired in the late 1990s. Combs learned from her when she was a youngster and decided to keep dance instruction going in town. So, along with Standifer and Parker, the trio began the academy in 1998. After moving into their Buckeye location in 1999, the dance troupe slowly grew and currently has 200 students in town.

"We had students coming from Goodyear," Combs said. "A lot of people asked us why we weren't expanding."

The answer was obvious with the downturn economy in recent years, though a deal came along and "the timing was right and we decided to do it," Combs said.

The Goodyear location offers classes beginning at 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday for children age 3 to 18 in jazz, tap, contemporary, ballet, lyrical, tumbling and hip hop. They plan to begin morning classes for adults in the summer with Zumba, tap and ballet, Combs said.

One final note: Desert West is a Christian dance academy. They don't use music with bad lyrics, the costumes are age appropriate and they are not afraid to use Christian songs in their routines, Combs said.

Another Buckeye business, the **Odyssey Preparatory Academy** at 6500 S. Apache Road, is hoping to expand to Goodyear soon, as well. The school submitted a site plan to the city for an 8.05-acre site off Harrison Street between Citrus Road and Cotton Lane. The campus would consist of two classroom buildings totaling more than 22,000 square feet. The site also calls for a 12,811-square-foot administration/gymnasium building.

Construction is scheduled to begin the first week of April and the Goodyear campus will be up and running on Aug. 22, said Holly Johnson, Odyssey's co-founder and director.

The campus will be able to accommodate 650 students from kindergarten to eighth grade, and other than a few snots in a few grade levels. it is already filled in. Johnson said.

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than a few spots in a few grade levels, it is already filled up, Johnson said.

"We had no idea this was going to be the response," she said of the two-year-old charter school, which first opened its doors in September 2009 at 4290 S. Miller Road, a Buckeye shopping center. The school has kept the shopping center space for its kindergarten students in Buckeye, dubbed the **Iliad Academy**, and last September moved the students in first to seventh grade into its new 33,000-square-foot Odyssey campus on Apache Road. They have about 800 students between their two Buckeye campuses.

The school plans to add a grade level every year, 2011-12 will be eighth grade, and is looking at building a fourth campus for students in seventh to 12th grades, Johnson said. They hope to locate the fourth campus somewhere between the upcoming Goodyear locale and the Odyssey Buckeye campus, she said.

Also in Buckeye, **Civitan Foundation**, a service provider for individuals with special needs, opened a facility in mid-March at 405 N. Third St., which is on the campus of **First Southern Baptist Church**.

The nonprofit organization remodeled the former pastor's house and is using it for an after-school program for children with physical or developmental disabilities between the ages of 5 and 17. Hours for the after-school program are 1 to 6 p.m.

The Day Treatment Training program was designed to enhance skills, promote independence and to develop learning and social skills.

The DTT program will also continue in the summer for children with flexible hours depending on the needs of the families, said Noreen Crane, program coordinator with the **Civitan** Foundation.

Crane told Mr. Briefcase she plans to take the children on field trips during the summer and hopes to have them perform some community service as well, if they are able, in the form of simple tasks such as folding mailers or stuffing envelopes.

The Buckeye location is also in need of employees, Crane said.

The location is currently enrolling special-needs children for the after-school portion of its DTT program as well as the summer portion, she said.

Keeping with the school theme, **Bel-Espirit Day School** has a coming soon sign where two former businesses were located, **Fred Astaire Dance Studios of Arizona** at 1375 N. Litchfield Road, Suite 106 and **California Pools and Spa** in Suite 105. That location is on the southeast corner of Litchfield and McDowell roads in the same shopping center as **Target**.

An employee at the school's current location, 4860 N. Litchfield Road in Litchfield Park, the southwest corner of Litchfield and Camelback, wouldn't tell Mr. Briefcase if that location was going to close once the Goodyear spot is ready. Stay tuned as Mr. Briefcase hunts down the answer.

Also relating to schools, a building permit from the city of Goodyear was issued to **Great Hearts Prep Academy** for tenant improvements in the La Piazza center, which is on the north side of McDowell Road, a little west of Litchfield Road. Great Hearts is converting several commercial and office development suites into a school.

OK, let's finish with a non-school business in Goodyear.

Goodyear Self Storage and RV at 2121 S. Litchfield Road is expanding its area by six acres, bringing the total size to 17 acres.

With the expanded space, the facility will add 350 spaces for recreation vehicles, bringing the total amount of RV spaces to 580, said Carol Schultz, who along with her husband, Robin, are property managers for the facility.

The couple lives on site, adding to the facility's security, she said, which also includes 10-foot walls.

The four-year-old establishment also has 725 self-storage units with air conditioning, Carol said. Unit sizes range from 5-by-5 to 10-by-25.

The facility is also a U-Haul dealer, so they rent the trucks, she said.

And now you know what I know. Class dismissed.

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