

Businesses Branching Out

OWNERS TRY VARIETY OF METHODS TO DRAW CUSTOMERS DURING RECESSION

By Sara Sullivan

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At the serene White Lotus Salon and Massage in Fayetteville, patrons can get a haircut, a hot stone massage, a facial — and a work of art.

The walls of the small waiting area feature works by rotating local artists, and have since the salon opened in 2006.

Owner Patricia Kulish just wanted some art around and to give burgeoning artists some exposure, she said.

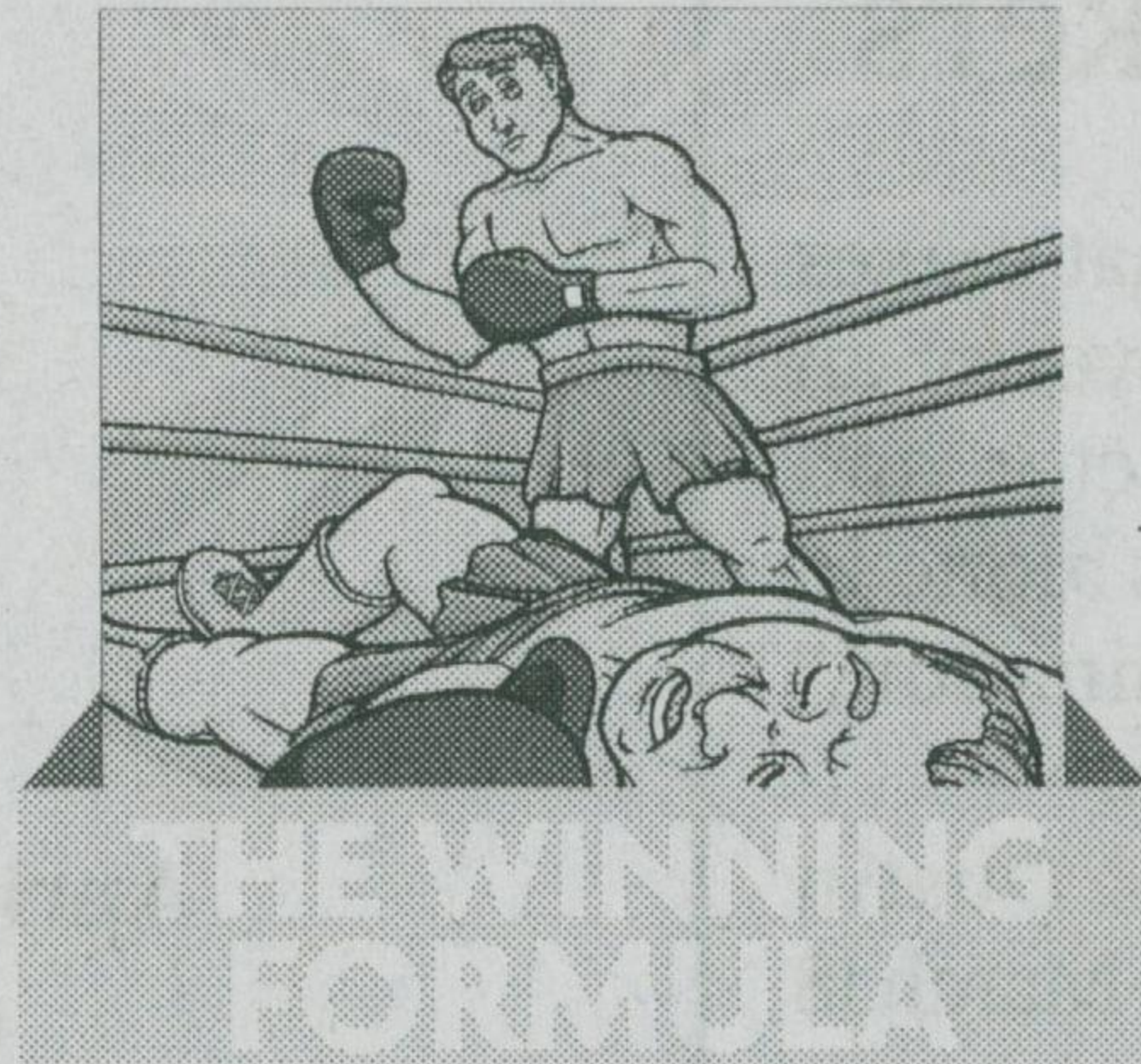
Three years later, she's managed to turn open wall space into another way to attract customers.

Businesses in Northwest Arkansas are trying a variety of methods to survive the recession.

Kulish said she and her staff host monthly art receptions that average about 35 attendees. The salon takes a small commission from the sale of the artworks, but it's pretty much only enough to cover the cost of the receptions and a little advertising, Kulish said. The real value is providing an additional service to clients, letting the staff interact with each other and the customers, helping the artists and drawing in new customers.

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BACK IN THE RING ROUND 4



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around. It benefits everybody."

Eddie Haskell's Patio & Grill in Rogers began offering karaoke, or Eddie-Oke, on Wednesday nights about a year ago.

"Just a little change of pace for guests to come in. People seem to really enjoy it," Rick Harris, principal owner and operator of the restaurant said. "It's become part of our identity."

Harris said, "We have to be constantly reinventing ourselves; it's a matter of 'what's next.'"

The restaurant's business model is fairly economically stable, he said.

"People are going to eat and drink down to the last dollar." But now they're looking for more value for that dollar.

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PATRICIA KULISH, Owner, White Lotus Salon and Massage
Talking about the monthly art receptions she and her staff host

At the end of the day, restaurants are really in the entertainment business, Harris said. Yes, people are paying for food and drink, but they're essentially paying for enjoyment.

Eddie Haskell's also offers live music, games and drink specials. "Just different things to have some activity and some fun," Harris said.

The Mellow Mushroom pizzeria franchise in Fayetteville hosts Trivia Night each Wednesday.

The eatery, which opened in November 2008, has held the games for almost a year.

Lindsey Clark, a manager at the restaurant, said they chose to host the games on a weeknight to bolster typically slow sales.

"It's made a huge difference in our sales on Wednesday. We actually fill up on a weeknight," she said.

It creates a family environment with regular customers. "On Wednesday, I get to see lots of familiar faces," Clark said.

"I think a lot of businesses ... are looking for something similar to make their guests feel like they're almost part of

the business."

Mellow Mushroom also offers a Beer Club promotion, which started soon after the trivia began.

If patrons drink one of each of the 70 beers available at the restaurant, they get a T-shirt, their name on a plaque, an engraved glass mug and a discount on beer.

"It's just something else that can keep our guests entertained," she said.

"Find your niche," said salon owner Kulish. Prioritize, follow what you really believe in and then adjust, Kulish said.

She took the art showings a step further by hosting an Art Market in December, which featured handmade gifts by 23 artists and craftspeople.

The special event boosted retail sales 35 percent for the Christmas season, Kulish said, and the staff averaged a 50 percent increase in sales commissions. Gift certificate sales were also up.

Kulish says the monthly art receptions are hit-or-miss for sales. "But I know we get more exposure and fellowship, if you will, by having them," she said. "Certainly more sales than if we did nothing."