



Six Cass business owners present views on succeeding in today's retailing environment

By [MONICA LUNDQUIST](#)
Cass County Correspondent

HACKENSACK - Six Cass County business owners offered their views Wednesday about changes that have occurred in retailing over the years and ways they have found to succeed in business.

Larry Jacobson, owner of Hiawatha Beach Resort at Walker, moved here in 1960. About 20 years ago, he saw a shift from resorts serving as a fishing camp to being a family destination site.

His resort built a new lodge a few years ago to accommodate that change and offer a wider variety of family activities. He finds it's more important to please the moms than the dads today to get repeat business.

Roy Huddle, whose resort also is on Leech Lake, said he finds community cooperation essential to provide and promote activities for resort guests. Chamber of commerce groups have become his most effective advertising vehicle in recent years, he said, adding the Internet has become essential.

He said Explore Minnesota and fall festivals have helped market the area. Smaller market newspapers now bring him more customers than metro newspapers, he said.

The Leech Lake Band's area-wide cooperative promotional advertising also has helped Huddle's business, he said.

Their comments were made at a Cass County Economic Development Corporation seminar.

Dave Holk, who has managed Cass Lake Building Center and Leech Lake Lumber 25 of his 34 years with the firm, said he tries to add humor to his newspaper and radio advertising to set it apart from other businesses.

We all sell the same products, he said, so it is a business's service that makes the difference. Having good employees is essential to making sure customers get good service.

John Wetrosky and his wife, Jackie, bought Silbaugh's Department Store at Pine River from her parents in 1978. They saw a 15 percent drop in business when Kmart located in Baxter and have seen customer shifts other big box stores locating in Brainerd and Baxter caused.

Their strategy has been to track what sells and what does not in their store, then buy accordingly. Sometimes, he said, it has been surprising to find some of the higher-priced items that have sold in their store, he added. "You have to justify the stuff you handle," he said. Your inventory will tell you who your customer is, he said.

Cindy Paulson, who owns Lucette's Pizza and Pub restaurant in Hackensack, said that city's fall and winter festivals help her business.

She maintains a customer data base and makes personalized mailings to customers. She sent a current menu and gift certificates to more than 80 area resort owners. She tracks where her customers live to get an idea of how often she might expect repeat business.

She sees a potential for keeping resort customers busy all week by jointly advertising events in multiple neighboring towns.

Larry Gavin and his business partner recently purchased and extensively remodeled the Anchorage Inn restaurant, east of Longville. They are targeting family business for people who live and spend summers here. They have developed a repeat customer base, he said, but want to expand on that.

"You have to be who you are and target people like yourself," Gavin said.

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