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Merchants

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“(A big challenge is) finding staff that are motivated to learning, wanting to excel at their career, and having passion for what they are doing,” Eisen said.

Although Eisen’s services include online sales, she said many shoppers still want the personalized experience of dealing face to face with another person.

“We are here to take care of everything you need, you are dealing with a human being who cares about your satisfaction and wants you to be happy with what you have purchased,” Eisen said. “Supporting local people not only helps the local economy and business, but also allows your dollars to build the community and make it stronger.”

Hal Marcus Gallery

Hal Marcus, a professional artist since 1970, opened the Hal Marcus Gallery 1996, specializing not only in his own art but also works by other local artists, especially those considered “Early El Paso Artists.”

The gallery began in Kern Place, moved Downtown and now is at 1308 N. Oregon, just across from his home in Sunset Heights. Few other private galleries have survived in El Paso, and none as long or as well-known as the Hal Marcus Gallery.

Marcus said his secret to a long life is to have a “passion” for his business, although this does not always mean making a profit.

“With that in mind I realize that sometime I’ll make money and sometime I’ll lose money,” Marcus said. “However, because of the skills that we have learned through customer service and making good and honest business decisions we have been able to be successful.

“Also, having your own business and being your own boss gives us the freedom to be creative entrepreneurs that most large companies do not experience,” Marcus explained. “Having customers come in and take home an art treasure makes it all worthwhile.”

Marcus feels holiday shopping at the gallery is “a magical experience,” especially at his annual “Happy Hippie Holiday” arts and craft fair held each December. This year’s event is Dec. 9-10.

The growth of online merchants, including art sites has not diminished the sales of the gallery’s own art, he said. Being an art space with an actual presence in his hometown community is essential to achieving one of his primary goals, spreading the love of the El Paso and Juarez area through the arts. More and more people are rediscovering the El Paso area’s appeal, he added.

“The city is going through a Renaissance and identity reinvention. We seem to be thriving because of the artists we represent and their unique local flavor.”

The Art Center

The Art Center of El Paso, 3101 E. Yandell, began in 1949 as a frame shop in the garage of founders James and Bessie Hackett. They soon expanded into a full art supply store frequented by some of the area’s most respected artists such as Tom

Lea, Dorothy Geyer, Manuel Acosta, Jose Cisneros, Noel Espinoza and others.

In addition to still serving as an art supply and frame shop, the Art Center features a gallery, sign shop, restoration and airbrush services, and classes.

Art Center sign manager Jody Arenivar, who has been with the Art Center for 28 years, said not only is the business itself long-lived, customers can rely on consistency in the employees they meet, as the center’s representatives in various disciplines and media have been there for at least 15 years or much longer.

“I think one of our biggest assets is customer service,” he said. “One of our ladies has been here since the 60s, and the center has been around longer than her.”

Each person at the center, he said, doesn’t just specialize in something they know about, but something they love.

“We’ve all got experience in what we do,” he said. “Our airbrush person (Frank Rosales) is also an active airbrush artist.”

Good service by itself isn’t enough, Arenivar added, noting that the Art Center specializes in carrying items not found elsewhere, and making sure those items are of the highest quality.

“We might not always be the cheapest,” he said, “but we’ll have the best materials for you.”

Although the Art Center maintains a website and uses social media to supplement its physical store presence, he noted that when dealing with items such as art supplies, people want to be able to talk with someone who knows the item, can make suggestions, and help them avoid making the wrong purchase.

“We made a personal connection with the customers,” he said. “You get to talk with people who have a knowledge in what you are buying, and you can’t always get that online. When you actually get to talk to people you will get more out of them, and be able to get what you need.”

No one magic charm

Richard Dayoub, president and CEO of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce — who has run his own travel business for 30 years — said there is no magic formula to continued success in the local retail market.

“There is no silver bullet on how to have a long-lasting business, because you have no way of knowing what the future holds each year,” Dayoub said.

However, there are some tried and true measures businesses can follow to remain competitive, he said. One is to always keep track of the competition, as well as your own customer base.

“Always know your competition in the market place, and what they are doing,” Dayoub said, “and always know your customer.”

He said knowing exactly who a product or service is extremely important.

“Who is your customer?” is one of the hardest questions a business owner can be asked, but one that is often overlooked.”

He suggested business owners do some market studies, take surveys and keep track or who is buying their products to find which market they best served. Likewise, he said to look at some of the

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