

Perk Up! Want to Open a Neighborhood Business? Start Here.

by Tim Fox, Neosho Street



This October, Murdoch Perk, the restaurant/coffee shop/art gallery on the southwest corner of Murdoch and Macklind, turns five years old — and business is as strong as ever.

“We survived the economic downturn while other businesses didn’t,” says Murdoch Perk co-owner Ed Gartner. Ed — who owns Murdoch Perk with his sister and business partner, Stephanie Seemiller — sat down with *SoHa News* recently to share his advice for others who want to start a neighborhood business in the City of St. Louis.

Ed’s first tip is to call the St. Louis Business Assistance Center (622-4120). This often overlooked resource provides step-by-step guidance on everything from securing necessary licenses to obtaining financing and all points in between.

“They will help you wherever you are in the process,” Ed says. “That should be the first phone call you make if you are serious about starting a business in the city.”

Next, Ed suggests talking to the people in the neighborhood. Stop them as they walk their dogs, carry their groceries in from the car, or play with their kids in the park.

“Even something that seems simple like a coffee shop comes in many different forms these days,” he explains. “Ask people what they

want — Full meals three times a day? Just coffee and pastries? Coffee-related merchandise? People will be happy to tell you what they want. Listen to them.”

Next, put together a comprehensive business plan.

“Things will come up that you didn’t expect. You need to have a plan to deal with the unexpected,” says Ed.

In that vein, Ed also suggests managing your expectations and being realistic.

“There will be times that you don’t make money. There will be times when you have to work eighty hours a week. You need to anticipate and accept those things as part of being a business owner.”

“People will be happy to tell you what they want. Listen to them.”

The key to working through the rough spots is drawing on the strength of the neighborhood that surrounds you, Ed adds. He admits that locating in the city has challenges, like adequate parking and handicap accessibility, but the city has its rewards, too.

“We often see real estate agents come in with prospective homebuyers,” says Ed. “They are using Murdoch Perk as a selling point for the neighborhood. That helps to stabilize the community and make SoHa the great neighborhood that it is.”