

Mt. Kisco Outfit on Mission to Employ the Developmentally Disabled

By Martin Wilbur

A Mount Kisco-based nonprofit organization is making life a little easier and a lot more rewarding for adults with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Extraordinary Ventures New York (EVNY), launched about three years ago, opened a shop last September at 350 Lexington Ave. in the village, a place of employment for adults who have aged out of school and other programs.

The storefront, located in the back of the building and accessible from Carpenter Avenue, provides several services for the public, said Andrew Tedder, EVNY's program director.

One portion of the space serves as a small laundromat, where local businesses and residents bring loads of laundry, which is sorted, washed in high-capacity machines, dried and folded by the employees and neatly bundled in see-through plastic. Laundry loads and the machines are color coded and instructions are posted throughout the laundromat area to help the employees complete their tasks.

Another part of the operation sees the workers make candles and handmade jewelry that are sold as gift items or small gift baskets, perfect for a range of occasions, from year-end teacher appreciation presents to holiday office grab bags.

A recently added component is what



Brian, one of about a dozen employees at Extraordinary Ventures New York, folds laundry with Program Director Andrew Tedder.

Tedder calls "business solutions," where the organization's employees shred documents brought to them by businesses and professional offices.

With the unemployment rate for developmentally disabled adults at an estimated 85 percent, Tedder said EVNY provides a place for its employees to earn a paycheck and enhance their self-esteem but also contribute important services to their community.

"I need my people to know that they're doing a service and they're doing a good job for people," said Tedder, who currently has about a dozen workers under his direction.

One regular laundry customer is a

Katonah nail salon, which brings its smocks and towels for weekly washings. A recently widowed Mount Kisco resident hadn't done his laundry in weeks since his wife passed away and desperately needed help. A local family with seven children has figured out that it's easier and more efficient to bring their load to EVNY's laundry service.

Each customer's laundry is ready for pickup within 48 hours and costs \$25 a bag. EVNY has a supply of its own bags with its logo emblazoned on the outside.

Tedder said employees typically work a two- or three-hour shift a few times a week. They must punch in their time card and be supervised by their own jobs coach. They can choose one or a combination of tasks, but high-quality work is demanded.

"Our expectations are high. We don't want folks with lower expectations in the employee population," Tedder said. "It's step-by-step instruction."

The idea for EVNY came from its current Board President Melanie Schaffran and her husband, Drew. They were instrumental in establishing the Devereaux Millwood Learning Center about 25 years ago with other parents of children on the autism spectrum. In fact, some of the current employees are graduates of the school.

Tedder said from the basement of their home the Schaffrans started EVNY for their adult child. It was modeled after

Extraordinary Ventures North Carolina serving the Chapel Hill area, a similar organization with which there is no official affiliation, but it has encouraged and mentored its Mount Kisco counterpart, he said.

Tedder met Drew Schaffran while he was working at the John Jay Homestead farmers market, one of many jobs Tedder, a single parent, has done since his now 11-year-old son was diagnosed with autism about eight years ago and could no longer commute into the city.

Previously, Tedder had a long career in retail for a variety of companies domestically and abroad and has put his experiences into practice at EVNY.

"I love kind of evangelizing the cause," Tedder said. "I have a lot of experience at startups, growing up in startups, but I have a personal stake in (this) mission."

His mission is to find more employees and make the general public aware of EVNY and to use its services. Tedder said it's not a social service agency and runs like a business. The goal is for EVNY to eventually be self-sufficient, although it receives grants and donations.

"This is meaningful work," Tedder said. "It's not busy work."

For more information about Extraordinary Ventures New York, call 914-708-7743 during regular business hours or visit www.EVNY.org.

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