

*"To make it work out there
you have to go get it."*

Mentors help print shop owner to stay in black

PAWTUCKET — Today is a lean time financially for many small businesses, and for some it's simply become just a great labor to remain profitable.

Jeanne Salisbury had met challenging times before. While raising five children, she apprenticed for 14 years at her sister-in-law's printing business, Rapid Printing in North Providence.

It's a laughing matter now, she recalls, but it was humbling at first, for Salisbury knew very little about printing and less about computers, never mind that she had never turned one on. Over time she grew enough in her trade to consider starting her own printing business.

She eventually did, purchasing a Minuteman Press franchise in Pawtucket. Then the recession hit hard in 2008. Through diminished returns, her enterprise struggled but survived. This year was worse. The end, despite her hopeful nature, appeared near. Rather than closing doors, though, she called the Small Business Administration (SBA) in Providence for help.

Salisbury was referred to

the Rhode Island chapter of **SCORE**: a team of business professionals who mentor at no cost to new and established small businesses. Steve Gareau, a SCORE mentor, called on her Central Avenue business.

According to Gareau, who draws his vast experience from various concerns as a business owner, he simply gives a gentle nudge to those that have gone astray. "I help people figure out what they want to do," he said. "Focus, stay to plan and be diligent," he tells them.

Coined by him as the "funneling effect," ideas are dumped into an imaginary funnel and what comes out is a more focused view of the direction to go. "What they feel in their hearts and minds is the strength of their direction," he believes.

Salisbury was looking to consolidate her debt, and had also considered, reluctantly, laying off her only employee who had been reduced to part-time. The numbers weren't adding up.

"Steve's pep talk lit a fire under me. The things he told me were pretty simple and basic," she said. For starters,

Gareau suggested hiring a salesperson to bring in new business, and she did. And signage and marketing were also a big concern. "I have a great storefront but customers were driving down the street without seeing it. We actually went out to the street and looked at the building and he gave me some great ideas."

"Rapid Printing had such a strong local customer base," Salisbury recalled. "I didn't realize I had to market." In this economy, she's certain marketing has become more of a necessity. "If you don't market, you won't make it," she said emphatically.

In addition, as a customer convenience, Gareau recommended extending business hours. Minuteman Press is now open later, until 6 p.m. on weeknights, and Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Reaching out into the community through improved sales and marketing is paying dividends. Revenues are up 300 percent. "We're just doing phenomenal," Salisbury said. "To make it work out there you have to go get it."

"Bad times are really when your expertise comes out," Gareau added.

Minuteman Printing provides full-color printing and copying services, from business cards to brochures to wedding invitations and signs.

This August Salisbury marked her fifth anniversary as a small business owner. She recognized the significance of the occasion and how far she had come to reach the milestone, hoping for many more to come.