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## SBA reaches out to help small businesses

Lending standards tighten, but loans still available

BoNhia Lee – STAFF WRITER

Lending standards are tighter than ever before as the nation finds itself in a financial crisis.

But there is some help for small business owners who are finding it more difficult to navigate through today's economy. The Fresno district office of the U.S. Small Business Adminis-

"We have a lot of resources, information and knowledge we can share. I'm convinced we can help.

There's a lot small businesses can do during this economic downturn."

Carlos Mendoza Executive director of the Fresno District SBA office



and answer any questions or concerns they have about the current economic climate.

Cen Cal, meanwhile, works with businesses on obtaining financing for an expansion or large equipment purchases through programs like the SBA 504 loan.

"We have a lot of resources, information and knowledge we can share," said Carlos Mendoza, executive director of the Fresno

tration and Cen Cal Business Finance Group in Fresno are lending business owners a hand.

The SBA has set up a free hotline for the first time to help counsel small business owners

SBA loan | 10

Marc Astone has bought five companies since the beginning of 2007 to expand his firm's reach across California.



TAINESE ARCENEAUX

## ON TOP of their game

Leading ad agencies make strategic moves to boost growth, give clients better service

Tainese Arceneaux – STAFF WRITER

The top two local advertising agencies are relying on strategic alliances and acquisitions to retain clients and grow while riding out the uncertain economic climate.

ASTONE, the No. 1 local firm with \$55 million in 2007 capitalized billings, last week announced its acquisition of Aviatech, a small San Diego firm with 35 employees and a focus on online advertising. That follows similar moves in the past two years in which ASTONE picked up smaller firms in the San Diego, Sacramento and San Francisco markets to grow to about 80 employees.

No. 2 Thielen IdeaCorp, meanwhile, has concentrated on deals with local firms who were willing to trade a roster of clients and the independence of running their own shop for the stability of being part of a larger firm. The company, which reported \$23.5 million in 2007 capitalized billings, acquired Janzen IdeaCorp last year and recently announced a strategic alliance with Charles Looney Advertising, a longtime Fresno firm.

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## Senior care industry sees big growth spurt

Aging population creates challenges, opportunities

Tainese Arceneaux – STAFF WRITER

Over next few years, the senior care industry is going to experience an explosion as members of the Greatest Generation and Baby Boomers age.

According to the National Institute on Aging, approximately 35 million Americans are 65 or older, and that num-

ber is expected to double in the next 25 years. In California, the elderly population is expected to grow twice as fast as the rest of the state by 2020.

There's also huge growth projected in what the California Department of Aging classifies as the "oldest old"

Seniors | 23



Right at Home franchise owner Tami Brangham stands with her husband Lance outside of the in-home senior care service office in Fresno.





Buddy Roberts (left) faces off against Rafael Real during the first Rumble in the Park mixed martial arts event at Woodward Park. Some members of the Fresno community felt the venue was inappropriate for such a violent event. A second event is scheduled for Nov. 1.



Promoter Rick Mirigian (above), the man behind Rumble in the Park, said he doesn't mind the controversy as long as he can educate the community about mixed martial arts.

## Promoter Rick Mirigian offers no apologies for hosting controversial event in Fresno's Woodward Park

Gabriel Dillard – STAFF WRITER

Rick Mirigian's entrepreneurial streak started at age 7, when he sold Garbage Pail Kids collector cards in front of a Fresno liquor store.

Now Mirigian, 31, is one of Fresno's most high-profile event promoters. He estimates he has organized around 8,000 nightclub promotional events and more than 100 large arena shows.

Out of all of these events, perhaps the most controversial is Rumble in the Park, a series of mixed martial arts (MMA) events featuring contenders trained in a variety of fighting styles attempting to pound each other into submission.

MMA events are nothing new to the Central Valley. It was Mirigian's recent venue of choice, Woodward Park, which raised the hackles of some in the community.

Some feel violent events such as MMA are not appropriate at a family environment such as a public park. Mirigian doesn't agree, but he is pleased the controversy is sparking discussion.

It certainly did not stop him from announcing a second Rumble in the Park scheduled for Nov. 1. He welcomes the jabs being lobbed his way.

"I'm not exactly everyone's favorite person," Mirigian said.

August, was a sellout that drew 4,000 people to the newly-renovated Rotary Amphitheater at Woodward Park. Another 1,500 fight fans were turned away, Mirigian said.

Mirigian said many in the community assume these events draw an unsavory crowd of gang members and other hooligans. But what he saw was a mixed crowd, including Fresno Mayor Alan Autry and Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, who were simply seeking entertainment.

"People think it's just a bunch of crazy guys leaving the bar," Mirigian said.

**"My goal is to put our city at the forefront of this world."**

Promoter Rick Mirigian

The event has even turned into a political football for Fresno's two mayoral candidates. When asked during a recent debate if cage fighting should be held at Woodward Park, both candidates said no.

Henry T. Perea said a venue such as Selland Arena would be more appropriate. Ashley Swearengin called the event a "train wreck" that shows a lack of communication at city hall.

The debate also spilled onto the popular email bulletin board Mindhub.org. Craig Scharton, chief executive officer of the Central Valley Business Incubator, was

### The fight over a fight

The First Rumble in the Park, held in

**Focus |** from 14

one of many who weighed in by saying some visitors expect a tranquil experience when they go to Woodward Park.

Scharton attended a performance of "Hamlet" held at the park the same night as the fight. He said the noise from Rumble in the Park was a distraction for Shakespeare fans.

"I don't really care what grownups do," Scharton said. "But it is a park situated in a neighborhood with a bird sanctuary. It was designed to be a somewhat passive park."

Scharton said he doesn't fault Mirigian for promoting the event. He said the City of Fresno should set logical standards when it comes to hosting violent events at public places.

"I could open a store that sold beer to 17-year-olds that would be wildly successful," Scharton said. "I can't do that."

City officials maintain it would be unlawful to exclude certain types of events from being staged at its public venues.

**MMA develops devote fan base**

Mirigian said Rumble in the Park was a way to bring the world of MMA to the masses in Fresno. But he acknowledges the area is already a hub in the world of cage fighting. Many residents don't know that, he said.

MMA events are a mainstay of local venues such as the Tachi Palace Hotel & Casino and Table Mountain Casino.

The Central Valley is also home to several training centers that teach MMA fighting styles, including the Pacific Martial Arts and Buhawe MMA Camp in Fresno, New Era Martial Arts in Clovis and the Valley Fight Club in Hanford.

One of Fresno's most family-oriented events, the Big Fresno Fair, recently featured MMA for the first time this year. A series of fights were staged at the fair's outdoor pavilion. The event drew an estimated 3,500 people away from the traditional carnival rides, corn dogs and art exhibits.

Fresno attorney DeWayne Zinkin is the cofounder of Zinkin Entertainment, a sports management firm that specializes in mixed martial arts fighters. Zinkin manages the career of one of the sport's most popular athletes, Chuck "Iceman" Liddell.



Fresno Mayor Alan Autry (center) and Police Chief Jerry Dyer (top left) were among the 4,000 spectators at the Rumble in the Park event



Fresno's own Casey "The Underdog" Olson throws a jab at Aaron Miller during his match at the first Rumble in the Park.

Mirigian said Zinkin was helpful in bringing some big-name stars to the Rumble in the Park event. He said it's natural to promote such events in this region, given that MMA has such a devoted fan base.

"My goal is to put our city at the forefront of this world," Mirigian said.

**Seizing an opportunity**

Mirigian isn't a diehard MMA fan, but he recognizes an opportunity when he sees it, he said.

He was inspired to promote an MMA match in Fresno when he attended an event at the Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Always mindful of the crowd at such outings, Mirigian said the energy of the 13,000 people in the arena was like nothing he had seen before.

"Everyone was looking at the ring girls and all of the celebrities around us," he said. "My mind was focused on the production, the lighting, the staging of it. I said to myself 'I've got to bring this to Fresno.'"

Though some of the assumptions about MMA are surprising to him, Mirigian welcomes a debate on the matter. He said controversy is good because it creates a community dialogue. He sees his role as an educator to show the community MMA is an appropriate use for a city park.

"I like the opposition," Mirigian said. "It only helps better the facility and the use of it."

Mirigian, a former mass communications and journalism student at California State University, Fresno, used his financial aid check to promote his first event, an after-party held at downtown Fresno's Rainbow Ballroom for a CSUF basketball game. He said the party was a success, and it gave him the courage to drop out of college to be a full-time promoter.

In a line of work where Los Angeles or Las Vegas is considered more of an entertainment Mecca, Mirigian has chosen to remain in Fresno. He said he loves the town of his birth and wants to promote events such as Rumble in the Park to make Fresno stronger.

"I want Fresno to become an entertainment destination," Mirigian said.

**MOVIE SCRIPT DEAL A KEY ACHIEVEMENT**

Out of all the events Rick Mirigian has promoted, one of his favorite achievements isn't an event at all.

Mirigian met Jim Birges during a pickup basketball game at a Fresno gym. Nearly a quarter century before that meeting, Birges and his family had hatched a scheme to extort \$3 million from Harvey's Resort Hotel in Lake Tahoe.

Their plan was to build a bomb. The extortion attempt failed. The bomb was accidentally detonated, causing \$13 million in damage.

After researching Birges, Mirigian felt it was a great story line for a movie. He bugged Birges for three months about pitching the story to Hollywood. Eventually Nick Cassavetes, director of "The Notebook" and "John Q," decided to write a script for the movie entitled "Bombing Harvey."

Commenting on the efforts he went through to get the deal done, Mirigian said he has never shied away from hard work. He said he draws inspiration from stepfather Ben Soto, who is suffering from cancer. Though Soto is undergoing chemotherapy, Mirigian said he has never complained about his condition.

"If I had cancer, I would be scared, I would be complaining," Mirigian said. "You would hear about it."