



# SMALL BUSINESS

Dec. 12-18, 2014

A report on small business and entrepreneurship

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## Briefcase



### Hotels in spotlight at tourism forecast

The runway for hotel development is open across the region.

At the Visit Santa Barbara 2015 Travel Outlook held Dec. 8 at The Four Season Biltmore Resort, vice president of lodging industry analyst firm PKF Consulting Bruce Baltin said hotel occupancy and room rates should jump again next year.

With Santa Barbara County occupancy and revenue already at new highs, Baltin told attendees that lodging demand should increase by almost 2 percent next year, pushing overall occupancy to a historic 76.4 percent for the county. Average daily rooms rates are also expected to climb 6.5 percent to \$212, he said.

Those numbers should be encouraging news for developers Michael Rosenfeld and Rick Caruso whose La Entrada and Miramar projects, respectively, are showing signs of life.

### DELTA UNIT WINS AWARD

Motor fuel provider ARRO Autogas, a division of Paso Robles-based propane marketer Delta Liquid Energy, earned a Sustainability All Star award at the 2014 Green Fleet Conference & Expo this fall.

### MUSIC ACADEMY GRANT

Music Academy of the West will receive a \$20,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to develop a partnership with the New York Philharmonic. The New York Philharmonic will make its Santa Barbara Bowl debut next year.

### ABLITT'S GOES GREEN

As part of its five-year anniversary of going green, Ablitt's Fine Cleaners and Launderers plans to switch out their lights in January 2015 to save energy and be more eco-friendly. This is an extension of Ablitt's already robust recycling program.

### FASTSIGNS FOR OXNARD

FastSigns of Oxnard officially opened for business at 2339 N. Oxnard Blvd., located next to Big 5 Sporting Goods and Carl's Jr.

Owner Jill Bonilla was a global marketing manager for SloanLED before opening FastSigns. She has over 20 years of experience working with a variety of companies.

### LOMPOC VMC ADDS UNITED

Lompoc Valley Medical Center has reached a provider agreement with United HealthCare effective Nov. 1, 2014. The agreement will allow patients covered by United HealthCare plans to obtain medical services provided at Lompoc Valley Medical Center.

After an eight-year hiatus, members affiliated with the Minnesota-based United HealthCare can again have their medical needs met locally.



COURTESY IMAGE

Salt, located at the heart of State Street in Santa Barbara, is home to North America's largest salt cave.

## Worth the wait

### State Street venue features 250 million-year-old salt rocks

By Erika Martin

Staff Writer

State Street has long been the tri-county tourists' favorite destination for unearthing culinary and sartorial gems, but business owner Pam McCaskey hopes to add the largest salt cave in North America to that lineup.

To build the one-of-a-kind structure, McCaskey imported 47 tons of pink Himalayan salt from Pakistan, regarded as the purest salt on Earth. She has since been adapting the downtown Santa Barbara space enclosed by 250 million-year-old minerals to provide multi-purpose space with the hopes of creating a hub for community.

McCaskey was determined to build the one-of-a-kind structure in Santa Barbara after discovering a therapeutic cave on a soul-searching adventure in Vermont in 2011.

"My mom had passed and I just needed to get away and be alone," she said. "For

me, the ocean doesn't really do it; the mountains and the trees do it for me. So I just chose a place and I met with this crazy healer."

After spending a weekend with the healer in the wilderness, she felt the woman was there to guide her. "The last day, she put her hands on my shoulders and said, 'Your miracle is about to happen,'" McCaskey said. "I drove down the hill and I thought, 'I can turn right, because no one is going to tell me to turn left.'"

The next minute, she turned into a salt cave and went into a therapy session. McCaskey was fascinated with the business model as much as the health benefits. "I went in there and thought, 'Wow, there's 10 people in this room ... what a low-maintenance business. That guy just made \$100, times 10 — he's doing it right.' So I just started thinking business. I fell asleep, and when I woke up I thought, 'Wow, we could open this in Santa Barbara.'"

McCaskey said she also latched on to the idea due to its community-building

potential. "When we left the cave, we all kind of acknowledged each other like, 'That was cool. I don't know you, but we just did that together,'" McCaskey said. "And that was a sense of community that I think we lack in our society these days."

"It's a good excuse just to get quiet and turn off your phone," she said.

"There's also something about not having a place to go to where you belong. We don't go to bars anymore at our age, but we want to go somewhere. The church allows that, but there's no other place that we can go to feel like there's community. My whole thing has always just been: provide a place where people can come and just chill."

McCaskey said she began looking for a store location the minute she got home, patrolling State Street for open leases. When a space with a basement opened up, she immediately snapped it up, but then faced nearly two years of hurdles to

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## Lessons from Santa Claus, minus milk and cookies

No matter how you celebrate the holidays, or even which holidays you celebrate, chances are you know about Santa Claus. The jolly old elf brings merriment to the season, but he also teaches us many valuable lessons.

Of course, the first is the value of giving. Aside from milk and cookies, Santa doesn't get anything in return for the gifts he shares with others. That is the real spirit of giving — not expecting anything in return. The joy of giving is re-



HARVEY MACKAY

Mackay's Moral

ward enough.

Santa is a genius in marketing and public relations. His image is everywhere, and I'm pretty sure he doesn't pay a dime for the exposure. He attracts crowds wherever he goes. Businesses put him front and center in ads, decorations, even in big comfy chairs in prime locations in shopping malls. They practically beg him to show up.

He is recognizable and hasn't changed his basic look since time began. More people can

identify Santa than they can the president. His distinctive couture will never get him on a best-dressed list. But he doesn't concern himself with that. His message has remained the same: a simple "Ho, Ho, Ho." He doesn't drive the latest model car. He is who he is and he's content with that. What he does is more important than fad or fashion.

His attitude is contagious. He is always positive, reminding young and old alike to be good for goodness's sake. How he keeps track of who is naughty or nice doesn't re-

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## SALT

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get the first-of-its-kind construction plan approved and permitted. Hers is one of a handful of salt caves in an urban setting; love of rocks is all in the family as her husband is a geologist.

And beyond regulations, salt caves are a delicate environment and must be kept at a precise temperature and humidity. "It was a science equation for sure," McCaskey said, solved by a cadre of inventive planners, engineers and architects. "We had to engineer it so that none of the rock holds on to any of the footing of the building, so it wouldn't pull anything down in the case of an earthquake."

While upping iodine intake may seem counterintuitive, McCaskey said the Himalayan salt is fundamentally different than average table salt. "It took 250 million years to mature under intense tectonic pressure and has

been isolated from all exposure to impurities," she said. "It hasn't had to be purified, whereas sea salt has to be purified; it has to be bleached; it has to be heated to 1,600 degrees, where all the minerals are burned off, essentially. With Himalayan salt, we still get what we need."

The facility's centerpiece is a large cave room, which is mainly used for 45-minute halotherapy, or salt therapy, sessions. "I visited as many caves as I could, and most of those places were off the beaten path," McCaskey said. "The message they have given the public is that, if you have any kind of asthma or any kind of respiratory issues, come to us and we'll help you without you having to take drugs. So it's more homeopathic."

During a cave session, a machine known as a halogenerator atomizes salt particles to fill the air and deliver its healing properties through the respiratory system. Salt therapy has not been rigorously studied, but McCaskey many people report improvements in respiratory conditions such as the common cold,

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cystic fibrosis.

"The salt is anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial, so it helps open up your airways," McCaskey said. "Basically the salt stimulates movement of mucus so that the scar tissue can release, and people can actually heal from salt therapy." She said the salt also releases negative ions, which can increase serotonin levels.

McCaskey has opened the space to a variety of events, from yoga classes to movie nights for local elementary schools, and hopes to eventually rent it out for events.

Before founding Salt, McCaskey was a fitness trainer and massage therapist, and she hopes to bring more of her wellness background into her new venture. "My whole idea with this is make something beautiful like this and trap people," she said. "Get them in a room, and then while they're here, teach them how to take care of themselves better. Just give them one piece of information to improve their health."

Himalayan salt contains all 84 mineral and trace elements of which the human body is comprised. "We are like the salt, and so a lot of people resonate with it," she said. "And then some people just come in, hang out, and fall asleep."

The store also has treatment rooms where trained therapists deliver salt scrubs, massages and facial treatments, and offers a range of self-care and home décor products made from the mineral.

In May, the company opened a production facility on Anapamu Street once its product line expanded enough to require a certified kitchen. McCaskey said it has given them the infrastructure to make a much wider variety of products than before.

"We're getting super creative," she said. "We're branding lavender, citrus and eucalyptus as far as our eye pillows, neck pads and bath salts go."

The company is also planning to add flavored table salts and fresh-pressed juices.

## MACKAY

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ally matter — he encourages everyone to be their best. He rewards good behavior. And who doesn't like to be recognized for trying?

Santa respects deadlines. He knows from one Dec. 25 to the next that he has customers to satisfy. He is beholden to the calendar. It wouldn't work to try to stretch it into January or February. Reliability is an important trait.

Santa understands the value of tradition. Most of us have family or cultural traditions that bind us together. Businesses have traditions that customers anticipate. But have you

ever noticed what happens when someone tries to change a long-held tradition? Santa knows better.

Customer service is high on his priority list. He aims to please, and he rarely disappoints. I'm guessing he reads every letter written in a childish scrawl before he makes his list. If you happen to overhear a conversation between Santa and a child asking for the hottest toy of the year, you will likely hear a promise to do his best, but he has some other great ideas, too. He won't promise what he can't deliver.

Teamwork is central to his operation. The demands on him are enormous. He understands that he can't do it alone. A workshop full of elves and a team of nine little reindeer help him accomplish an impossible task year

after year. I've heard there is magic involved, but I have no evidence to support it.

In that same vein, he epitomizes leadership. He leads his team, but he also guides the rest of the believers toward the right path. He is consistent with his values. He is patient. He works hard. He is forgiving of mistakes and loves what he does. And that brings me to my next point.

I'm fond of saying, "Love what you do and you'll never work a day in your life." There can be no question that this guy wouldn't want to do anything else. Santa couldn't do what he's done for centuries without real enthusiasm for his efforts. Santa takes his work very seriously, but he doesn't take himself seriously. He loves to laugh, make people happy, bring surprises and spread good cheer. Santa understands that fun is good. In a world full

of serious problems, bringing a little happiness is a welcome relief. We can all do something to brighten someone else's day.

Here is a shameless plug for getting on Santa's "nice" list: This month I will once again be donning a Santa hat and taking a shift ringing bells for the Salvation Army. For 12 years I have had this pleasure, and I hope to continue this tradition for many more holiday seasons. I encourage you to toss a few coins or dollars into the red kettle, or help whatever charity you can. Even if Santa doesn't see you, you can be sure you have embodied his spirit.

**Mackay's Moral:** Happy holidays to all.

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