

Even best-laid plans fail without some recognition

By ADINA GENN

It can take a while for new event planners to get noticed, but when recognition comes, it sometimes comes huge.

For entrepreneur Andy Calimano, acknowledgement came via the Food Network. Calimano, the owner of Starfish Junction Productions, an event planning and production company in Lindenhurst, enjoyed his moment in the spotlight when one of his events, Coffee & Tea Festival: NYC, was featured on the Food Network show "Unwrapped." This bit of opportunity turned up after the cable channel tapped one of his exhibitors, New Jersey-based Jalima Coffee, for a segment.

Food Network shot the festival in July 2006, just shy of a year after Calimano and partner Ed Duhon launched Starfish. The inaugural event at the Metropolitan Pavilion let Calimano and Duhon, as part of their business model, give fledgling firms like Jalima free exhibitor space, complete with tons of exposure.

"Unwrapped" highlighted the festival in an episode called "Caffeinated," which aired April 9. The exposure might have given Calimano an added boost, had the show debuted earlier,

since he moved this year's event up to April 28 and 29, but he's still not complaining.

Since the show ran, several new exhibitors have called, he said. Last year, the festival had 40

exhibitors and more than 1,500 attendees; this year, Calimano expects as many as 50 exhibitors and, with the festival running in spring instead of summer, even more attendees.

"The first year, you don't turn a profit," said Calimano, who declined to discuss his investment. "You look for a three-year curve."

Joani Madarash hasn't scored attention through Food Network, but she is building her name among regional business circles.



WRAPPED UP: Event planner Andy Calimano's annual coffee and tea festival got a plug from the Food Network program "Unwrapped."

Madarash began offering event planning and management services in 2005. The owner of Smithtown-based accessLinx, Madarash had organized events for previous employers and built up her firm as a multimedia production company that also provides live captioning, Braille transcription and Web site development.

When a former colleague asked her to run an educational conference, Madarash took charge of what became a six-month project.

"There were sleepless nights," she said, adding that sometimes it seemed "the day never ended." But now that it's over, Madarash wants more event-planning projects.

So far, the majority of these assignments have been pro-bono, with Madarash serving as co-chair of the Blind Wine Tasting Gala and on the board and development council of the School Business Partnership of Long

Island, which hosts a VIP reception.

Madarash conceded that it takes time to develop this market. "It would be really nice if work spun out of" her community service, she said.

Because she suspects that Braille and Web site clients "think that work is all I do," she plans to educate her existing multimedia clients about her event-planning offerings. Once prospects understand her range, she hopes, business can mushroom.

That's what happened for Calimano, who runs the Farmingdale State Conference on Entrepreneurship (to be held May 12), now in its third year, and expects 400 attendees.

But for Calimano, as some business takes off, other business takes a back seat. He's dropped a scrapbooking day

that didn't attract enough vendors and put an Italian festival "on hiatus" until he finds the right venue, he said.

Starfish Junction Productions

Web site:

www.starfishjunction.com

Address: 275 West Hoffman Ave.,
Lindenhurst

Phone: (631) 957-7035

accessLinx

Web site: www.accesslinx.com

Phone: (631) 360-2763