

8A STRICTLY BUSINESS

Getting around with Ability



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON
Eddie Hanna, owner of Ability Transportation Services, rents vehicles that are accessible to the disabled. Hanna opened the company last year after moving from Richmond, Va.

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

What can you do when your wheelchair bound loved one wants to go out to dinner?

Or perhaps they need to go to that family reunion in Florida. Maybe your handicap-accessible van is being repaired.

Just call Eddie Hanna. Hanna, himself confined to a wheelchair, began Ability Transportation Services last year.

He rents special vans for the handicapped on a daily basis.

"My customers are individuals who want to take a friend or someone they are caretaker for out, usually for short periods," he said. "My rates are on a 24 hour basis."

"The reason I wanted to go into the rental aspect of adaptable vehicle rental is to give the individual the opportunity to travel at their leisure, rather than with the time restraints of the services. I give them freedom to go when they want to go."

Hanna has four vans equipped to carry people in wheelchairs or those unable to ride in regular

vehicles. The vans have televisions and VCRs. One is a luxury van for longer trips.

When he started, Hanna said he did not know there were so many people unable to get around because of a lack of transportation. He said he may get into running a regular transportation service, but said "this is interesting right now and it is picking up."

"This leaves me with a lot less headache rather than competing with other services," Hanna said. "I like what I am doing now."

Vans have been rented to pick up loved ones for outings or for the evening.

"One lady had not been out of the house for three years," Hanna said. "She had tried a service but was not satisfied. She was in a wheelchair, but she was also obese. It was a good feeling to be able to furnish this to the lady. They kept the vehicle for a couple of days and visited some people she had not seen for quite a while."

Hanna is running a special with 20 percent off the daily rate

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Mothers' helper



PHOTO/HARLEE LITTLE
"Mompreneur" Sandra Maye-Key, a custom cake designer and president of Amazing Cakes, works on her computer as her daughters Hollis, age 2 and Sinclair, age 5, play in the background.

AT&T program works with U.S. 'mompreneurs'

By Missy Daniels
SPECIAL TO THE POST

BASKING RIDGE, N.J. — There is a new group of small business owners springing up across America called "Mompreneurs."

Mompreneurs — nearly 10 million of them — are women with children who have embraced the concept of being their own boss. They are jumping into the small business ring, some of them even setting aside the demands of a full time job, so they can spend more time with their kids while setting up home-based businesses.

According to work-at-home

experts, Ellen H. Parlapiano and Patricia Cobe, authors of "Mompreneurs, A Mother's Practical Step-by-Step Guide to Work-at-Home Success," this new breed of business owners is powerful and growing.

"Today's mompreneurs want more control of their time and more flexibility to be with their kids. Home-based businesses help many women achieve this," Parlapiano said.

In an effort to assist in the growth of this unique category of home-based businesses, AT&T now offers a small business start-up program called AT&T Resources for New Business, a comprehensive

small business program.

"We're experiencing a boom in membership which we know is driven by new market niches including mompreneurs," said AT&T Vice President, Small Business Markets Cliff Holtz. "Mompreneurs' attraction to our program reflects the reality of their already busy day and RNB's ability to relieve the additional burden of having to rear a business along with their other full-time parenting job."

The AT&T program includes the following components for its members:

- A starter kit with information to help get a small business off the ground and run-

ning;

- A free consultation with an industry expert

- Access to a 24-hour Fax-on-Demand service with articles ranging from marketing and navigating the Internet to telephone techniques and advertising;

- Access to the program website, which offers online sessions with industry experts and a wealth of small business background data;

- A quarterly resource guide containing additional information on how to manage and grow a start-up business;

- A dedicated resource center that can be accessed through a toll-free number;

- Discounts on products and services, including equipment, software and payroll services from industry leaders

Parlapiano said mompreneurs need to rely on the best resources available that can help them balance their work and family.

"AT&T's program is a perfect example of how small businesses can look to big businesses for that kind of help," she said.

Small businesses can obtain program and enrollment information by calling the AT&T Resource Center at 1-800-STARTER (1-800-782-7837) or by visiting the website at www.att.com/rnb/.

Money Management

Smooth out your mortgage

By Amanda S. Danchi
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Applying for a mortgage can be a complex, expensive and emotionally charged experience. But there are some steps you can take ahead of time to make the process go more smoothly. Here are some suggestions from the North Carolina Association of CPAs.

Check your credit report

When you apply for a mortgage, one of the first things the bank will request is a credit report.

Good credit is critical to securing a mortgage, and lenders place a great deal of credence on the information they find in your credit report. That's why you should make every effort to be sure that the information in your credit report is correct. Often, consumers assume that their fiscal responsibility has resulted in a clean credit report, and are surprised to learn that mistakes on credit reports are all too common. Occasionally, incorrect entries are caused by miss-postings due to similar names. You should be particularly wary if you have a common surname such as Jones or Smith, or if you are a "junior" or "senior." Other times, a dispute with a merchant over a billing error or returned or damaged merchandise may remain on your credit report long after the problem has been resolved.

By getting a copy of your credit report before applying for a mortgage, you'll know what creditors have reported, be prepared to explain any discrepancies, and have time to correct any errors. To request a copy of your credit report, contact one or more of the major credit bureaus for instructions: TRW (800-392-1122); Equifax (800-685-1111); and TransUnion Corp. (312-408-1050). You'll be charged a nominal fee (unless you've been denied credit in the last 60 days.

Close inactive credit accounts

The lender who reviews your mortgage application will be looking not only at how much you owe, but also at the potential amount of credit available to you. In fact, for the purpose of calculating your debt, some lenders consider the minimum monthly payment that would be due on each outstanding credit account, regardless of whether or not the account is active. The lender's rationale is that it is possible that, at some point after you obtain your mortgage loan, you could potentially use these accounts to run up debt that could affect your ability to make your mortgage payment.

The best way to avoid the risk of having too much credit available is to close inactive credit accounts.

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Real estate investment trust is income-oriented option

CHARLES ROSS

Your Personal Finance



If you want an income-oriented investment option, consider a real estate investment trust, called a REIT, (pronounced reet).

REITs trade like stock and invest solely in real estate or real estate mortgages. At present, in many cities, vacancy rates are down and rents are up, creating a strong market. In addition, REITs can do well even when other stocks are performing poorly, so they are a good way to diversify your portfolio and reduce your risk level.

Yields on REITs in recent months have been very

strong, and experts expect them to increase their dividends at twice the rate that utilities increase theirs. And on total return, which takes into account dividend growth and share-price appreciation, REITs have performed impressively. Even during market down turns, real estate investment trusts can be a winning investment, for both safety and income.

Telling one REIT from another

Choosing the right REIT can make the difference between dividends and disappointment. Like all investments, REITs carry unique risks. Among the red flags are yields above eight-point-five percent,

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Social Security faces special challenges

OMAR DILLARD

Financial Focus



A recent cartoon shows a fortune teller and her customer consulting a crystal ball. "I see you getting Social Security when you retire," the fortune teller says. Thinks the customer, "Now I know she's a fake."

Obviously, concerns over the future solvency of Social Security are growing, fueled by media reports spelling out the impending demise of our nation's retirement trust fund. Workers currently paying into the system wonder if there will be any money left by the time they retire, while the 33 million retirees and 10 million disabled workers, survivors and dependent children who are already drawing benefits wonder how long those checks will keep coming.

Before any of us start losing sleep over the future of Social Security, See SOCIAL on page 9A