

The *service* is payrolls



Amherst company
battles big names
for market share

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Do you know my company? John Bruno, president and CEO of ComputerSearch Payroll Services, hopes eventually to make the name of his \$2.3 million Amherst payroll processing business as familiar as its large rivals ADP and Paychex.

BY THOMAS HARTLEY | thartley@bizjournals.com | 716-541-1613

Even in the midst of the recession, ComputerSearch Payroll Services grew.

But the Amherst company still wants its name to become as publicly familiar as those of competitors Paychex Inc. and ADP.

Taking a leaf out of the playbook of rent-a-car agency Avis, whose commercials

target its big rival Hertz, ComputerSearch owners say they aim to try harder.

"Many people know about Paychex and ADP, but they don't know about us or have a clue about what we do. Our next aim is to become better known," says John Bruno, who joined the company in 1968 and now is

principal owner of the family business.

"There are other payroll processors much smaller than us and we were here before Paychex or ADP. (But laboring under our lesser-known name) has limited us. We have had to work really hard to let people know who we are and what we do," he said.

Who's Who: John Bruno is president/CEO and co-owner of the company; John Bruno Jr. is vice president and also a co-owner.

What's Happening: The company is a payroll processor that can service clients with

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GETTING AHEAD

West Side Bazaar — Entrepreneurs workshop March 29. Training session on state health requirements, licensing and importing, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Jericho Road Ministries, 184 Barton St., Buffalo. Call 289-1173.

Westminster Economic Development Initiative — Business mentoring March 30. Free mentoring for micro-entrepreneurs by WEDI counselors, 4-6 p.m., 271 Grant St. Go to www.wedi-buffalo.org or call Bonnie Smith at 870-6843.

Niagara County Community College Small Business Development Center — Marketing workshop March 31. Free microenterprise workshop on definitions of market, market segmentation strategies, 6-9 p.m., NCCC, 3111 Saunders Settlement Road, Sanborn. Call 434-3815.

SCORE — Counseling session April 6. Free one-on-one counseling session with retired executives, 7-8 p.m., Orchard Park Public Library, 4570 South Buffalo St., Orchard Park. Call 551-4301 for appointments.

His big party began in a garage

RIISING STAR: MIKE SCHWEIKOWSKY

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Being the seventh of seven children, Mike Schweikowsky might have thought in 1997, that because the year also ended in a 7, he would be in for a bit of luck.

He was. But it was mostly bad.

Angelique, his wife, was pregnant with their first child when unexpectedly her employer closed the office and she found herself without work. Four weeks later, Mike's employer went

out of business and his job also disappeared.

Suddenly, the couple were left staring at major new responsibilities and a monumental challenge: a newborn baby girl and new house, but no jobs and no income.

Their salvation was a part-time business that Mike started three years earlier while working as a press operator at his former employer, Buffalo Specialty Products.

"I took out a second mortgage on the new home and purchased additional equipment for the party rental business," Schweikowsky said, recalling the uncertain times 13 years ago. "In

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PAYROLL: Company's 2,000 clients represent a cross section of WNY businesses

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one employee to more than 2,000.

History: The present owners are the second generation of the Bruno family to run the company, which was founded in Williams-ville in 1967 as Pioneer Technology.

"But people kept asking us to do computer searches so we changed our name to what we are today," said the older Bruno, who with now-retired partner Robert Howland bought out the original owners.

Like the founding group – all former engineers at Bell Aerosystems – Bruno and Howland also worked for Bell.

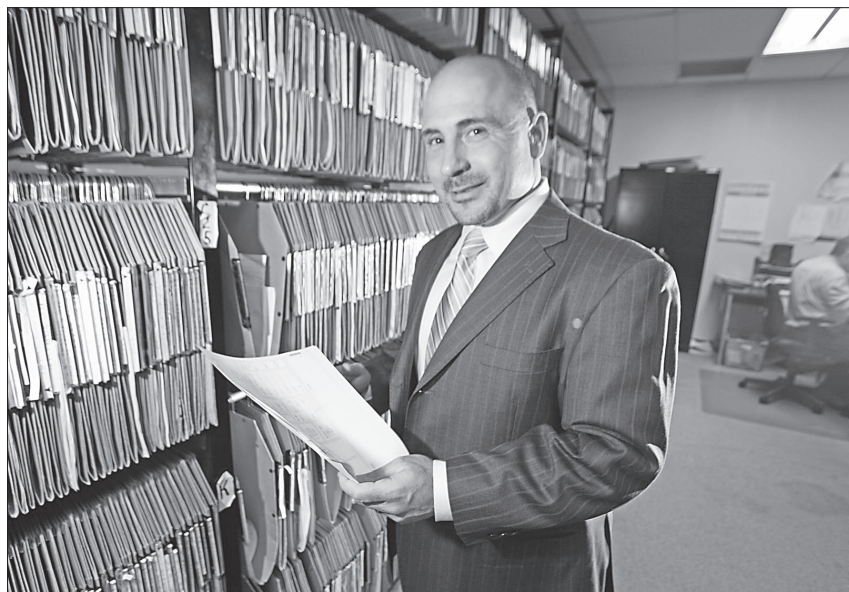
The acquisition in 1969 of a local payroll company, Paytronics, laid the groundwork for what today is the company's core business – payroll servicing.

At its start, ComputerSearch dealt with real estate information retrieval, on-line accounting and inventory systems, and medical billing. By the mid-1980s, the decision was made to concentrate solely on the area of payrolls.

Today, it includes such related services

as tax filing, direct deposit, and human resources.

The younger Bruno, who became a part owner in 2008, spent 14 years as a consultant with Microsoft before rejoining ComputerSearch where he worked while in high



John Bruno Jr., whose Amherst company has about 2,000 clients in Western New York, says the bulk of business is from employers with payrolls of from 1 to 100 employees.

school and college.

Revenue: Revenue for fiscal 2010 which ends on March 31 will be \$2.3 million. Fiscal 2011 projections are for \$2.5 million. Revenue between 2008 and 2011 is expected to show a 25 percent rise.

Employees: 27

Clients: The company's 2,000 clients are

Timely lesson

Believe: "There will be obstacles, but you have to believe in your plan and stay the course. You can't resist change, though. You have to be willing to evolve," says John Bruno Jr.



a cross section of Western New York businesses with the average employment being 25. "Typically, the sweet spot for us and bulk of our business is the employer with 1 to 100 employees," the younger Bruno said.

Territory: Ninety-seven percent of the clients are in a region stretching from Buffalo to Rochester and south to Pennsylvania.

Strategy for growth: Increased investment in sales and marketing, continued emphasis on customer service, and a focus on name recognition and brand identity comprise the company's plan for growth.

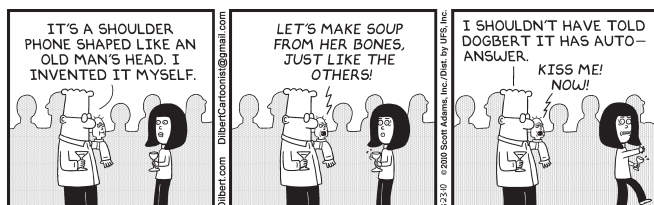
"There are 24,000 businesses in Western New York and there is room for us to grow here. Including all processors, only 30 percent to 40 percent of the market now is being tapped," the older Bruno said. "Though we serve the whole country, our marketing strategy and expertise is this region."

Biggest challenge: The company's biggest challenge is in competing against its national competitors, the owners say.

Biggest Accomplishment: Reaching the \$2 million milestone in 2008 is the company's acknowledged biggest achievement.

Impact of recession: "We had about an 8 percent drop in existing business in 2009 due to the recession but were able to sell our way through it to maintain minimal growth," said the younger Bruno.

DILBERT



SCHWEIKOWSKY: Tents, tables, chairs, grills, games

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the spring of 1998, I began managing the business as a full-time endeavor."

Today, the business that began in Schweikowsky's garage in 1995, Backyard Party Supply, has annual revenue of \$260,000.

"I make about three times what I did at Buffalo Specialty and get six months of the year off besides," he says.

Life for the Schweikowskys is markedly different than it was 15 years ago.

They now have three children – Mikhaila, 12, Bryce, 11, and Blake, 9 – and Angelique, who earned two masters degrees including an MBA, has a management position with Travelers Insurance in Buffalo.

And Mike? He still operates the company he launched in his garage with a few rent-a-tents. Today, the business at 1924 South Park Ave. offers a range of accessories for parties and other occasions, including large corporate affairs, trade shows, lawn fetes, weddings, churches and sporting events.

Because the business is mainly seasonal, Schweikowsky says it offers a big advantage: For six months he can be "Mr. Mom," a title that he thoroughly enjoys.

"My wife went to work full-time and with her higher education, her skills were more marketable. I was out of the Navy and had no higher education so we decided I would stay home with the children and I've done it since 1996," says the 42-year-old South Buffalo native whose father drove trucks and



Losing his job in the 1990s created an opportunity for Mike Schweikowsky to convert his sideline business into a full-time livelihood.

his mother worked as a waitress.

In 1995, when things were bleakest, Schweikowsky made his business full-time.

"Working with what we had, I took out a second mortgage on our home, purchased additional equipment, and in the spring of 1998 began managing the business as a full-time endeavor," he recalled. "We scrounged, saved and built the company."

Expansion meant that the business grew out of the one-car garage. The equipment was moved into mini-storage units and a run-down building on South Park Avenue was purchased for use as a store front where Mike can meet with customers.

The idea for Backyard Party Supply evolved from a similar business that his brother owned and still operates.

"He rented out tables and chairs, and when he started getting calls for tents I saw that I could provide them to him," Schweikowsky said. "We are both in the same business and have many of the same items. We cover each other. If one of us needs something and the other has it, we help each other out."