

BUSINESS

INSIDE

BUSINESS CALENDAR

BUSINESS PEOPLE

STOCK LISTINGS

Many businesses are jumping on the Tech Valley train



Jill Birdsall, a broker at TechValley Homes Real Estate, walks along Lone Pine Road in Guilderland in front of one of the homes her company has listed.

MARC SCHULTZ Gazette Photographer

By PHILIP SCHWARTZ
Gazette Reporter

Chalk up one for Miguel Berger for having a little faith in the future.

When Berger founded his business approximately three years ago, there were a few snickers about the name — TechValley Homes Real Estate. Now he's the one laughing.

"When I decided to open my business in 2001, I had a feeling the area was going to be known as a tech region," Berger said from his Loudonville office last week. "And I went for it, despite advice from others."

Names aside, TechValley Homes is riding the real estate boom, reporting a 166 percent increase in sales in 2003. So who's laughing about the name now?

Berger is one of a handful of

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Spokesman for the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce

entrepreneurs who have adopted the Tech Valley moniker for a business name. And it seems the trend is catching on.

So far, there's Tech Valley Payroll, Tech Valley Associates, Tech Valley Printing, Tech Valley Communications, Tech Valley Times and even Tech Valley Cleaning Services. And no doubt about it, this is a partial list.

Recently browsing announce-

ments of new businesses, Steve Janack, spokesman for the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce, said he even saw Tech Valley Concrete. "Over the last few months, they seem to be popping up out of nowhere," Janack said.

The whole Tech Valley idea originated with the chamber. It was an initiative the business group kicked off in March 1998 as the way to brand the region as a high-tech hub. The idea was that naming the region and marketing it by that name would help it forge a new identity.

The entire initiative came down to the essence of names: without them, there can be no identity; with them, a sense of identity will be born. The chamber's reasoning was that if people

See WHAT'S, Page C2

What's in a name? It's likely to be Tech Valley

Continued from Page C1

start thinking of the area as Tech Valley, it would become a Tech Valley, a hub for high-tech companies and new technologies.

At first, many laughed and saw the initiative as a sort of forced cheerleading without substance. But in fact, several small technology-oriented companies already called the Capital Region home.

Major players

Some of the naysayers started changing their tune in 2002, when major tech players like International Sematech and Tokyo Electron announced they were coming to Albany, where together with the state, they would invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the local economy.

Now, Janack said, more people are on the Tech Valley train, arguably evidenced by the new companies incorporating that name into their businesses. All of this naming puts "a stamp of credibility on the initiative," he said.

"My sense is that these businesses see Tech Valley as a key ingredient to their futures," Janack added. "They believe technology will be critical to their future. They're shaping, branding and imaging to associate with Tech Valley."

Perhaps the first to make this association was Tech Valley Communications, an Albany-based telecommunications and Internet service provider. That company began back in 1999 when the Tech Valley name was still relegated to obscurity, so

putting it on the company letterhead or on a massive sign outside the office was a risk.

"Some people may have thought it a bit corny. But the investors, the business people, I think they got it," said Kevin O'Connor, CEO at Tech Valley Communications. "It's good brand marketing. We wanted to associate our company with this region."

"We felt there were a lot of promising projects going on [in the local tech sector] and we came to the conclusion that this is what Tech Valley is about," O'Connor explained. And if technology is the future of the region, the company would be about providing high-tech communications and data service to the companies here, he said.

Implied promise

Berger, the TechValley Homes president, expressed a similar sentiment. "It's not just a name," he said. "It's what goes into it."

With Tech Valley embedded in his business' name, Berger said he's delivering on an implied promise to customers. That is, with a name like that, people are going to expect some high-tech services, even from a real estate broker.

The contemporary marketplace has created the Internet consumer, who demands as much information online as possible, Berger said. And he said TechValley Homes delivers this with a Web site that sets the company apart from the competition. For instance, 90 percent of the company's listings feature an online virtual tour, and detailed information about

school districts and community demographics.

As for Tech Valley business names, Berger said he's seeing more of it. "Actually, someone tried to open up Tech Valley Real Estate, and I had to fight it," he said.

On the other hand, this trend seems to be only happening in the Capital Region, even though Tech Valley technically spans an 18-county area along the Hudson River Valley, from Clinton County in the north to Dutchess County in the south.

Janack said businesses being named Tech Valley may only be a phenomenon reserved for the Albany metropolitan area for now. But the recognition of Tech Valley is slowly spreading from the Capital Region, Janack said, and perhaps this phenomenon will spread in the future to other areas.

Spread the name

Meanwhile, Guy Maddalone, CEO of Tech Valley Payroll in Clifton Park, said he's spreading that Tech Valley name as thousands of mailings with his company logo are sent out all over the country every week.

This kind of advertising is exactly what will help the Tech Valley name catch on elsewhere, said Maddalone, who founded GTM Associates in 1991. In October 2002, GTM officially became Tech Valley Payroll, which provides small-business payroll services along with human resources and employee benefits consulting.

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