

# Starting a business 101

By JAMES NASH Hour Correspondent

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"I've learned to surround myself with good people. What's always stayed the same in the business is the great people working for me. People love to share their business ideas," he told the audience. "Ask them."

In response to a question from the audience, Aitoro said the Internet has created a tough retail market and he see shrinking margins on the horizon. He said businesses must be flexible, and a dropped-shipped 800-pound refrigerator delivery is not equal to the service he can deliver.

"We make adjustments. We do whatever we have to do," he said.

Aitoro said giving back to the community is important and the store continually hosts charity functions. Upcoming events to be held in the store's Westport Avenue showroom will benefit the Caron Foundation, Habitat for Humanity and The American Cancer Society.

Diane E. Winston, a SCORE counselor and founder of the strategic communications firm Winston Strategic Partners, advised session participants to avail themselves of free business advice available through the SCORE chapter at 24 Belden Ave. in Norwalk. Winston also gave a presentation debunking business startup myths, and offered advice on what to do, and not do, when building a business.

During a break, Mike Rettenmeier, a UConn landscape architectural gradate, said he will be attending academy sessions with his boss who recently founded Eric Rains Landscape Architecture in South Norwalk.

After 20 years working on corporate side of the apparel business, Alex Modica said he's running a franchise called ShelfGenie, an installer of slide out shelving for existing cabinet and closet frames. Modica said he signed up for the academy to measure his senior vice-president level corporate experience against what's needed to run a small business.

"You don't know what you don't know," Modica said.

Mayor Richard Moccia was on hand to greet hopeful entrepreneurs. Before stepping to the microphone, he chafed a bit at some online criticism regarding time he spent at ribbon cutting ceremonies.

"I'll cut a ribbon every day if it means a new business," Moccia said.

Moccia went on to tell audience members they're in for a valuable treat, and pointed to the success a Michele's Pies, whose founder Michele Albano was an academy graduate.

"She actually was a student here, and she came back as a graduate. You're going to hear from some great people who know what they're talking about," Moccia said.

Before offering introductory remarks, chamber president and CEO Edward J. Musante, Jr. noted more than 1,000 people have attended the academy over the years.

For more information about the remaining sessions, call (203) 866-2521.

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