



Staten Island Real-Time News

Recession a boon to some doing business on Staten Island

Karen O'Shea
Sunday May 31, 2009



Shuttered storefronts and for-sale signs are indicators of the sputtering economy, but some businesses seem to defy the recession.

From a collections firm in Tottenville to a foreclosure Web site and dollar stores and pawn shops, there is business to be had.

The Manhattan law firm Eltman, Eltman & Cooper quietly opened a small storefront in Tottenville, the southernmost tip of the borough.

A company spokesman declined to comment, but a Web site describes the business as "the leading judgment enforcement law firm in the country." A press release explains that Eltman, Eltman & Cooper uses former New York City police detectives and officers to locate debtors and assets.

"A lot of people are having trouble paying their bills, even more so than a year ago because more people are out of work," said Claudia Wilner, senior staff attorney with the Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project, which recently raised concerns about debt-collection practices in the city.

"A judgment is a good investment for a debt buyer or credit card company because it can earn interest at 9 percent until the economy recovers," she added.

MORE WORK FOR THE SHERIFF

The city's sheriff, meanwhile, reports an increase in the number of court-ordered evictions it has carried out on behalf of foreclosing property owners and banks. The sheriff handled just one eviction in the borough in 2006. Last year, there were seven.

That number may seem low, especially since the borough has often posted the highest foreclosure rate in the city, but experts said such evictions are rare because most people who lose their homes or businesses typically leave before eviction is necessary.

Long Island-based real estate firm Masciale and Associates established the Internet domain name 4closures.com about a decade ago, long before the current economic downturn.

Today, Michael Masciale said he's selling about twice as many bank-owned properties on his site. He markets and manages foreclosed properties around the city, in some cases even handling evictions for banks.

On Roe Street in West Brighton, he recently sold a foreclosed two-family house for about \$270,000, or nearly 15 percent less than the \$318,500 asking price.

"It's twice as busy, but then again I had years where it was very, very slow," said Masciale.

He's not alone.

GOLD IS GOOD

The manager of Cash Now Inc., a pawnshop in Rosebank, said he got a rush of business last year, when people appeared to be selling more valuables to raise cash.

At Port Richmond Automotive Inc., owner Tim Fink said recently that business is picking up, in part because leasing options have ended at many car dealerships and some people are finding it harder to get loans to buy cars.

"I'm doing repairs I would not have done six months ago," Fink said. "People are keeping their cars."

Meanwhile, it appears that cost-cutting consumers are not willing to forgo wine and spirits.

Anthony LaMoriello, general manager of Aida's World of Liquor in New Dorp, said while the store is not growing at the same rate it has in the past, sales are still up this year.

LaMoriello said most consumers see wine as an affordable luxury, and many people are buying liquor and entertaining at home instead of going to restaurants.

"There is a heightened awareness of where everyone's dollars are being spent," he said.

BUCKING THE TIDE

Josh Braverman, a spokesman for the discount retailer Family Dollar, which has four stores on Staten Island, agrees.

National dollar-store chains like Family Dollar, which sells items for \$1 and up, have been growing in the recession.

At about 8,000 square feet, Family Dollar opens smaller stores in neighborhood strip centers or on commercial blocks.

"We can go into areas where other retailers cannot," said Braverman. "We don't like to think of ourselves as recession-proof, but certainly recession-resistant."

This document is provided for "fair use" not-for-profit, educational purposes (and other related purposes). If you wish to use this copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond "fair use," you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.