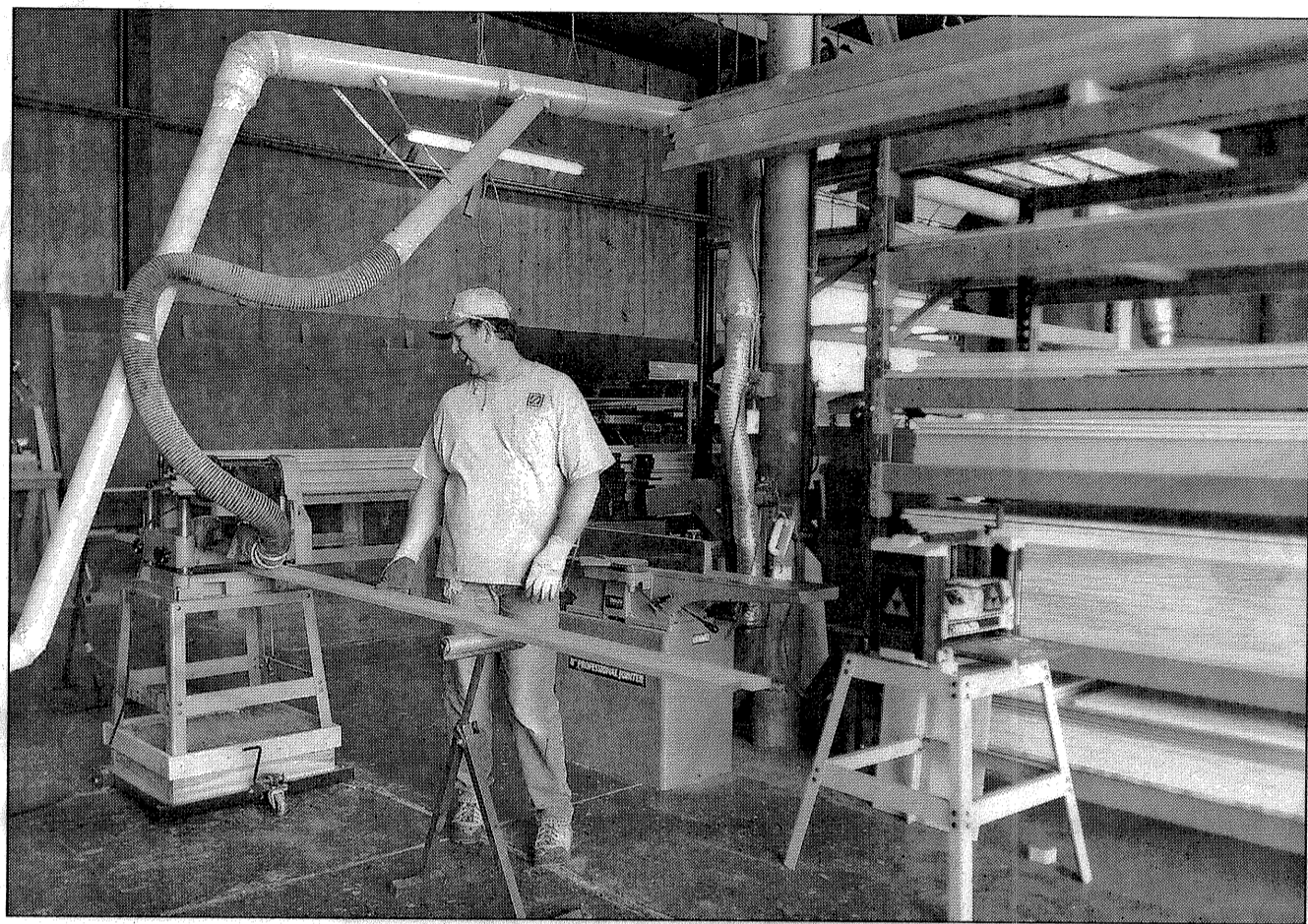


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LOCAL & STATE

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FRIDAY
JUNE 9, 2006

KEEPING SCORE



Photos by Courtney Cloyd/The Wichita Eagle
Ted Sullivan planes trim for one of Zernco Inc.'s construction projects. Zernco president David Zerngast says sales may approach \$25 million this year, thanks to help from the Service Corps of Retired Executives.

Volunteer's advice proves profitable

BY PHYLLIS JACOBS GRIEKSPoor
The Wichita Eagle

David Zerngast has a standard piece of advice for business owners — ask for help when you need it. And even more important, listen to the advice when it's given.

If you don't know who to ask, he has more advice: Call the Small Business Administration and ask about a SCORE counselor.

"I can't say enough about that program," he said. "I think they are just the best."

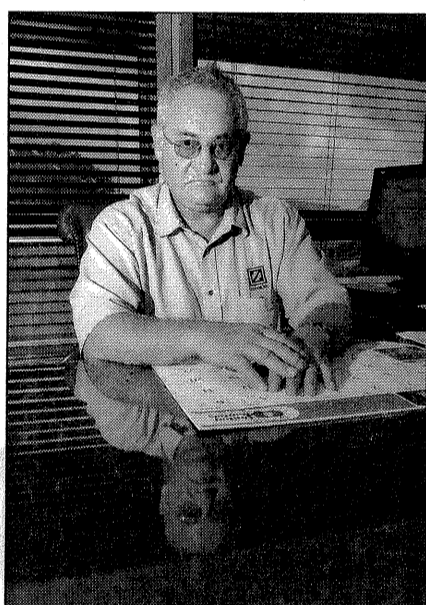
SCORE, the Service Corps of Retired Executives, is a nonprofit organization sponsored by the SBA. Counselors are volunteers who offer free management assistance and advice to small businesses.

Between 35 and 40 volunteers work with SCORE, said volunteer Frank Harris.

Most are retired and all have specific skills they can offer. Zerngast, 51, founder and president of Zernco Inc., a commercial contracting and remodeling business that specializes in building restaurants, learned about SCORE as a college student in the 1970s when he did an internship preparing feasibility studies for businesses that had come to SCORE for help.

It would be years before he realized how valuable that contact would become.

First, he got married, had children and worked a couple of jobs in addition to dabbling in self-employment as a



David Zerngast, president of Zernco Inc., gives SCORE volunteer Stan Barnett credit for helping him manage his fast-growing firm.

remodeling contractor. Then came a decade of working for a larger company that specialized in restaurant construction, rising to vice president of operations.

That job involved a lot of travel. When his children — now 11, 12, 13 and 14 — came to live with him and his second wife, Jan, he wanted to be closer to home. So he started a small cabinet shop in his garage.

It wasn't exactly a dream come true, however. Five years went by and Zerngast found himself and his employees working 16-hour days. He often worked seven days a week, as did his

Now you know

ZERNCO INC.

Owner: David Zerngast

What they do: Build, remodel and repair commercial properties, specializing in restaurants

Address: 11225 SW Highway 54, Augusta

Phone: 316-775-9991

Best advice: Ask for help. Listen.

To contact SCORE: Call Wichita Small Business Administration, 316-269-6571

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wife. The business was growing — he had gone from a starting year of \$118,000 in sales to almost \$500,000. But he felt he needed advice.

That's when he remembered his time at SCORE.

He got in touch with the Wichita Small Business Administration, which assigned him a counselor, Stan Barnett.

"I met with Stan that first time, and he asked to take a look at my business plan," he recalls. "I told him it was in my head."

That wasn't good enough.

"He told me he wanted to see it in writing by our next meeting," he said. "I was up until 12:30 in the morning before the meeting. I wanted to be sure it was right."

He credits Barnett with teaching him about cash management, costs and

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ZERNCO

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profit margins.

The company grew. And changed.

From a company largely doing cabinet projects, it grew into a full-service contractor building restaurants. Today, the company has nine new construction projects in progress across the United States, 18 remodeling jobs, eight service jobs doing smaller repair work and seven cabinet jobs.

Most of his new construction jobs are out of state, he said. An exception is the recently completed Moe's Southwest Grill at 3743 N. Rock Road.

Much of the remodeling or service work is closer to home.

Three years ago, Zernco moved to a new facility just west of Augusta at Barnett's urging.

"I thought it was too big," Zerngast said. "We filled only a third of the offices at the time."

Now all the offices are full, and it might be time to look at an even larger place, he said.

In 2005, the company had between \$12 million and \$13 million in sales. In 2006, Zerngast projects that will increase to between \$20 million and \$25 million.

"A lot of the credit goes to Stan," Zerngast said. "I still look forward to meeting with him every month. And someday, I hope to become a SCORE volunteer myself and help someone else like me succeed."

Reach P.J. Griekspoor at 316-268-6660 or at pgriekspoor@wichitaagle.com.