

Preventive Health

Customized business niche succeeding in Michigan.



Ira Margolis: "I wanted to stay in Michigan and give something back."

Ruthan Brodsky

Special to the Jewish News

People closest to Ira Margolis have absolutely no doubt he will succeed in his new business because he is personable and understands the need to provide great customer service.

Friends and family are convinced that those skills, combined with Margolis' ability to research and problem-solve, will result in the creation of an innovative business niche that works.

"He came home one evening and announced that the mortgage business was no longer working and he had started looking for another

business," says Jocelyn Margolis, Ira's wife and mother of their three children. "I knew the mortgage business was in trouble and I fully supported his decision. He has always achieved in whatever he does and is completely committed to supporting this family."

Last spring, Margolis established the Andover Wellness Group.

For the past 15 years he was in the mortgage business, the last eight as president of Andover Title & Escrow Agency in Southfield. After researching several possibilities, Margolis found himself exploring the wellness industry.

"My father was a doctor and my mother an active volunteer in the community," said Margolis. "I was

comfortable in the medical world and I wanted to stay in Michigan and give something back to the community.

"I realized that after last year's flu pandemic, vaccination would probably increase. And then I read how much an employer could save over a year by spending \$25 for an employee now. I was dumbfounded."

Employee absenteeism is a huge business expense. The wellness industry is about providing businesses, large and small, with preventive health services and education programs. They help companies reduce health insurance costs and maintain healthy employees for efficiency and productive results.

The challenge in this effort, however is employee participation in the wellness program. Programs tend to demonstrate economic efficiencies when at least 75 percent of the employees actively participate.

Margolis has solved this participation problem, at least when it comes to avoiding the flu. Andover Wellness brings the flu shots to company facilities and offices. His staff of RNs may set up their stations in cafeterias, hallways or dispense the vaccine moving from cubicle to cubicle.

Companies can either cover the entire cost of the flu vaccine or pass along some cost to employees. The costs of the flu shots depend on the number who agree to be immunized, varying between \$25 and \$30 per person.

"In my business search, I managed to meld my interest in helping people stay well and providing local businesses with needed support," says Margolis.

Warner Law Firm in Troy recently engaged Andover Wellness for its employees.

"We have only 15 people in our law firm, which means when one person is out sick it is a nightmare trying to keep pace with our court dates, paperwork and depositions," says Rob Warner, president. "When the flu season arrives, we could have as many as two or three out of the office. I don't think that's going to happen this year because we all took the flu shot."

Margolis quickly discovered that not having a medical degree was a major obstacle to establishing the business. He resolved that issue by hiring [redacted] who has 35 years' experience practicing medicine, as the company's medi-

cal director. Margolis also obtained a manufacturer wholesaler license from Michigan so that he can sell vaccine supplies to other medical personnel.

Andover Wellness uses preservative-free vaccines that are administered by nurses who work under [redacted]. Employers cover the cost of the nurse to administer the shot, which is about \$50 an hour. Each nurse vaccinates about 15 people per hour. Nursing fees are waived if more than 40 people are vaccinated.

To diversify its services, Andover Wellness conducts related programs, including health risk assessments, blood pressure and cholesterol checks for clients throughout the year.

Margolis hired Scott Werner, president of Werner Marketing Group in Birmingham, to help market the new company and offer general consulting. "Ira put in a tremendous amount of research into this wellness niche," said Werner. "He was able to focus on his talents and strengths and, as a result, Andover Wellness has been very successful this first year."

Even with all the preparation, Margolis didn't realize that his job description required changing.

"There are so many misconceptions about the actual vaccine," explains Margolis. "I have to educate business owners and human resource departments that keeping their employees healthy is one of the best ways to keep their employees productive."

"Andover Wellness participated in one of our health awareness events and was a perfect fit for my clients," says Suzie Mekler, a partner of Renew Hair and Skin Center in Bingham Farms. "My clients were thrilled that they could attend and take care of their flu vaccination at the same time. I benefited because the clients felt I cared enough about them to make this arrangement. Ira was wonderful and made all my clients feel very comfortable."

Margolis did his soul-searching knowing that changing careers is not easy. "I put in the effort and consider myself fortunate to find a career that works well with my values and interests and has potential for success in Michigan." □



Scott Werner