

# Community Involvement Helps Build Business

*Jody Zaker has made it a point to be a strong part of her Florida locale.*

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

Success in the self storage business requires good customer skills, nice, clean facilities and solid security. But perhaps the most underrated and most beneficial thing that facility owner/operators or managers can do is also be a strong part of their community. And when it comes to community relations, there are few better than Jody Zaker.

Zaker manages the Paul & Jerry's Self Storage facility in Spring Hill, Florida, which falls under the umbrella of Accountable Management. And as far as Sherri Loeffelholz, Accountable Management's vice president is concerned, Zaker brings a zest for her job and a love of her community into the equation that goes well beyond the norm.

"Jody has been an exceptional addition to our team," says Loeffelholz. "She has truly redefined marketing in every sense of the word. She has led the way with innovative new marketing ideas, as well as new ways to increase community awareness and involvement. This has been great for not only our company, but for managers all over the country who have read about her and sought her guidance on community-related events for their own stores."

So it should come as no surprise that when Zaker is asked for some words of wisdom, among the first things she says are, "Get out there and tell the community how great your facility is and show them why they should store with you. If you tell them, they will come. Marketing, marketing and more marketing!"

Zaker, a native of Chesterfield, Missouri (just outside St. Louis), left Missouri to finish her education in business and nutrition in Rockford, Illinois, and spent 10 years as a district sales manager with Kraft Foods in its retail and wholesale divisions. She then started her own business with a route of specialty foods and catering. Next, she brought those talents to Sarasota, Florida, where she managed food service and catering as a personal chef.

In 2003, she relocated to Spring Hill, Florida, and found the job situation less than desirable. At the location where



*Jody Zaker, in her office at Paul & Jerry's, has made her facility become an integral part of the Spring Hill, Florida, community.*

she and her partner were storing, the management team suggested they try self storage management.

"We pursued the lead and hired with a national storage company," Zaker says. "After learning the business and becoming successful, we looked for a company that was more customer service oriented and family friendly. We were so blessed to find Accountable Management"

## Community Relations

While understanding the basics of self storage management was important ("Always put the customer first and let them know how much they are appreciated," she says. "Treat them as if you had invited them into your home."), Zaker also understood the need to become an integral part of her community.

"I am an active member of our chamber of commerce and attend all their marketing functions," Zaker adds. "I have joined the chamber's Diplomats, which is a great way to market to businesses while attending the ribbon cuttings and business marketing showcases. I joined the Kiwanis and am very active as the chairperson for community service, which allows me to plan the fund-raising events which I am able to incorporate into some of the events at Paul & Jerry's Self Storage."

"Sincere involvement in the private sector and the business community is very important for building strong relationships. Major marketing through any venue is so important and a must to get your business' name out in front of the public."

Local involvement also involves making an effort to improve her community, and Zaker and Paul & Jerry's dive in headfirst with that concept.

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“Our annual Spring Splash was our first marketing event geared toward education, safety and the welfare of children,” Zaker says. “We were able to get the community and business contacts to participate with a child ID program, an early learning coalition with fun educational booths, food vendors, jumping houses, and child karate exhibitions, to name just a few. The sheriff and fire departments are always involved to lend advice on safety.”

“We started a blanket drive for the homeless that brought an outpouring from the public of mass proportion. The newspapers and TV stations helped spread awareness of the problem and gave us a great amount of exposure. United Press International even picked up on the news and people from all over the country were calling us asking how to get a drive going at their facility.”

Of course, good community relations are just one aspect of Zaker’s success story.

“It is very important to have a warm, secure, friendly atmosphere when someone walks through your door,” she adds. “It is just as important to know your business and your competition so you can guide your customers with information and help them make an informed decision on the right size and type of storage they need. We want all of our customers to feel they made the right choice to store with Paul & Jerry’s.”

“I feel the most important qualities in a manager would be honesty, integrity, compassion and the ability to make the customer feel comfortable in any situation,” Zaker concludes. “The manager must be a people person and enjoy working with the public. With our marketing and publicity and all the contact we have with the public, Paul & Jerry’s has become the facility that really cares about helping the community.”

That’s a strategy for success if ever there was one. ❖

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## Shake Up Your Business By Shaking Up Your Mind

By Mark Wright

Have you ever picked up a salt shaker at a restaurant and discovered to your frustration that nothing was coming out? You know the salt is in there. But every grain has bonded together. The little salt molecules are up in there holding hands, apparently desperate to keep themselves from ending up on your eggs.

Your eggs, meanwhile, are cooling by the second. So, you grab that salt container and shake it hard. You slap it against your hand, against your table, gyrating the thing until you feel those grains go loose inside and...ahhh...here they come, sprinkling down onto your steaming breakfast. Mmmm.

It’s the same thing at work sometimes. We want to spice things up, bring in more business, do stuff in smarter and more productive ways. But no great ideas are coming out of our head. We feel stuck. The best we can muster is a Homer Simpson-like, “Doh!”

To get unstuck, we have to follow Taco Bell’s tagline: “Think outside the bun.” We have to treat our brains like that salt shaker (only more gently) and pop out of our current mental groove.

Try this two-step process to escape from tunnel-vision prison. First, take a break. Get away from your desk, your office, or your facility. Walk around the block. Indulge that

craving for Twinkies (although I think Sno Balls are better). Breathe some fresh air and focus your eyes on objects you usually take for granted: those cars, that billboard, the electrical wires strung over the street.

Step two: Go back, but do not return immediately to your typical work tasks. Instead, go online to a thought-provoking website, such as *ted.com* or *fastcompany.com*. Or, pick up a book like *Groundswell* (by Josh Bernoff and Charlene Li) or *The Long Tail* (by Chris Anderson).

The goal is to not only shift gears out of the go-slow-low you were stuck in, but to transcend the “everyday” and enrich your thinking with mind-stretching concepts. Those concepts need not be directly relevant to your business. In fact, this works better if they’re not.

Because, while you’re perusing those websites or books or other resources you might discover, pretty soon a funny thing happens. You start thinking about your business in a different way. You can’t help it. Thoughts like, “what if...,” or “I wonder how...,” or “hmmm...” begin to pop into your mind. Questions emerge. Possibilities beguile you.

Before you realize it, the salt is flowing. You’re back! Don’t try to control it. Just keep shaking. It will help your brain—and your business. ❖

