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Business

Citibank Helps Some Clients With Show & Tell

Wantagh branch displays generate leads, customers

By Collin Nash
STAFF WRITER

The one-of-a-kind evening wear caught Irene Carr's eye. The pink two-piece ensemble highlighted with intricate black patterns in velvet looked like something she would expect to see on a Paris fashion runway.

Not at a bank branch in Wantagh.

"I was struck by the beautiful colors," Carr said recently, referring to the outfit worn by Madonna Cole.

Cole, of Madonna Originals, a designer and maker of hand-crafted contemporary and African-inspired fashions and textiles, is among about two dozen entrepreneurs who over the past year have showcased their products and services at the Citibank branch on Sunrise Highway.

Francine Kluczka, a Citibank account representative, conceived the idea for "Spotlight on CitiBusiness" to feature some of the branch's small-business clients.

"I saw it as a way to help the bank and our clients boost our businesses," Kluczka said.

Another half-dozen clients, primarily arts and crafts-type businesses, are scheduled to display their products by the end of the year. The program will run indefinitely, branch manager Cindy Kessler said.

The program dovetails with the company's stepped-up focus on small business since its 2001 acquisition of European American Bank, which was stronger in that field than Citi. Even with the acquisition, Citibank faces powerful competition not only from banks with a longtime local presence, such as J.P. Morgan Chase, Astoria Federal Savings, North Fork Bank, Fleet Bank and Roslyn Savings Bank,



Newsday Photo / Karen Wiles Stabile

Thanks to this display at Citibank in Wantagh, Madonna Cole has been asked to create window treatments, engineer a fashion show and teach multicultural textile design to elementary school students.

but also from newcomers such as Washington Mutual and Commerce Bank.

Kessler said the program has brought the bank about 80 new accounts. "Word gets out and new clients come," she said. "By helping these clients promote their business, their sales go up and our balances climb, too."

The American Bankers Association said the program appears to be unusual. "It's a nice way to tie into the community and give clients some recognition," said Brenda Marlin, associate director of the ABA Marketing Network.

Aside from giving their enterprises a promotional shot, participants said their businesses have reaped something money can't buy: credibility.

"Anybody can run a loss leader to get you in the door, but genuine commitment to your customers is difficult to promote," said Jerry Gedacht, president of Jerry's Car Care Center in Bellmore, a family-owned repair and used-car business that had a display at the branch earlier this year. "The program reinforces credibility of businesses."

The displays occupy a space about the size of a walk-in closet near the branch's parking lot entrance. A sign on the wall announces the initiative.

Beneath it, two bulletin boards hold small trays stacked with business cards of the current and previous featured businesses. Sometimes the entrepreneur is there in person.

One of the featured businesses was Oz General Contracting Inc., which remodels kitchens and bathrooms and manufactures cabinets in Farmingdale, with a showroom in Bellmore. "People see our ads and our trucks, but when you're in the bank, you get a chance to get a closer look at what we do," said Oz's president, Uzi Ovadia. The company displayed some products and photos of remodeling jobs it had done.

For Madonna Cole, a North Bellmore mother of two, the exposure she's getting is generating business leads. One customer wants Cole to create a window treatment for 16-foot picture windows and another wants her to produce a fashion show for the grand opening of a hotel in Puerto Rico. She also has been contacted by a seamstress interested in working for her. Even schools have called, she said, seeking her out to conduct textile design workshops with a multicultural emphasis.

"Because of the visual nature of what I do," she said, "this has been perfect for people to come and see my work for themselves, absorb and digest it and hopefully utilize my services."

\$5M Worth of Glitz For Garden City Hotel

By Jamie Herzlich
STAFF WRITER

Long Island's best-known luxury hotel this week showcased an extra \$5 million worth of glitter — part of its first major renovation in almost 20 years.

The Garden City Hotel has completed renovations of its restaurant, lounge and lobby, the first part of a three-year, \$25 million overhaul that started in July.

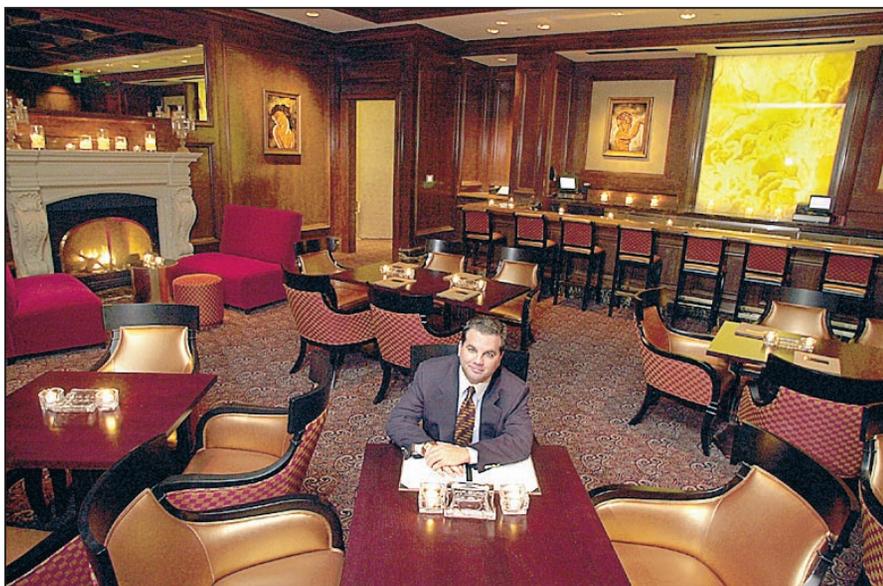
Among the biggest changes: The restaurant and lounge are no longer visible from the lobby. Both are now totally enclosed and the lounge has more than doubled in size, to 2,200 square feet. But the restaurant was scaled

back from 120 seats to 88 to provide a more "intimate" environment, said Brian Rosenberg, a vice president at the hotel. A wine room also was added, with 1,000 bottles of wine to be displayed in eight refrigerated cases.

Barbara Nelkin, owner of the hotel, who worked with Warwick, R.I.-based DiLeonardo International on the designs, said the renovations incorporate "a little of everything . . . a little of today, yesterday and a little jazz and funk."

Some spectators who got a peek of the renovations Monday night at a VIP party said the new bar and dining

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Newsday Photo / Jim Peppeler

Brian Rosenberg, a vice president at the Garden City Hotel, in a newly remodeled bar and restaurant area on Monday.