

# MOHAWK VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Diner owner launches social-media business

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**COLD BROOK** — When Kim Tranter and her husband Scott purchased the former Empire Diner in Herkimer in 2006, Kim never thought continuing the family's knack for running restaurants would spin off into a new business opportunity for her.



Tranter

Tranter, now owner of U Learn Social Media, hosted her first social-media seminar for small businesses in June and will host her fourth seminar on Sept. 9 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Holiday Inn on Burrstone Road in

New Hartford.

The Tranters owned and operated four restaurants in Southern California before deciding to move to the East Coast in 2003. After settling in Cold Brook, the family lived off the revenue from their California restaurants, in which they maintained a majority-ownership stake. However, after seeing the Empire Diner, located near the corner of Route 5 and North Main Street in Herkimer, change ownership several times, the couple couldn't resist the opportunity when they spotted a "For Sale" sign in the window one day.

Scott Tranter spent about five months cleaning the place up and opened it as Crazy Otto's Empire Diner in July 2006. "Then the economy tanked," Kim

Tranter says. People weren't going out to eat as much, which meant the Tranters had to come up with some new ways to reach out to people and encourage them to spend their dining dollars at the restaurant.

"I immediately began to try and figure out alternative means of marketing the diner," Kim Tranter says. She made up coupons to hand out to local elementary students as a reward for good work in hopes their parents would take them to the diner to redeem their free meal. She also made sure the restaurant was included in GPS systems since it is so close to Exit 30 of the New York State Thruway/I-90.

"Little did I know then that I was taking my first steps into social media," she says.

### Social media

Those social-media efforts continued a few years later when Scott Tranter became a certified instructor for the ServSafe food-safety training program and wrote a series of "The Diner Wizard" cookbooks in 2010. During the process, Tranter says she learned even more about branding, marketing, and using social media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Places, and blogs.

The Tranters hired a social-media consultant for five months — at a cost of \$1,000 per month — to help get their efforts off the ground. The whole time, Tranter says, she was learning the ropes from the consultant so she could eventually take over the social-media efforts herself, and she did just that after their

five-month contract expired.

Tranter says her education didn't stop there. She took webinars, read every social-media book she could find in the "Dummies" series, and did whatever she could to learn more about social media.

"I just kept learning and then people started coming to me to ask, 'Hey Kim, how did you do that?'" she says. All those requests for help led to Tranter holding her first seminar on social media in June. Five people attended the three-hour seminar, which launched U Learn Social Media.

During the seminars, Tranter offers a very hands-on learning experience to help take away the fear of social media. "A lot of people are intimidated by social media," she says. "This takes some of the intimidation out."

Tranter offers up the success at Crazy Otto's Empire Diner as proof of her social-media skills. The restaurant has not only weathered the recession, but has recently logged some of its best sales days in recent weeks. The restaurant's Facebook page has about 450 fans.

Right now, Tranter doesn't have any goals for her social-media business other than to see where it leads. She enjoys learning more about social media and sharing her knowledge with other small businesses. Many small-business owners are busy running their firms and haven't had time to research social media, she notes. "They still think of social media as their kid's Facebook," she says. □

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