

Using Business Principles to Create Ventures Focused on  
Social Change

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>> SPEAKER: Welcome to Disabilities at Work Radio where every week we explore issues, leading initiatives and innovations involving the employment of people with disabilities. We feature employers that go beyond compliance in supporting people with disabilities in the workplace and elsewhere. We bring you prominent members of the business community, service providers, government officials, researchers, educators and people who successfully manage their disability and careers. Join us now for Disabilities at Work.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Hello, I'm Ray Zardetto and welcome to Disabilities at Work Radio here on the VoiceAmerica business

radio network. Disabilities at Work Radio is brought to you this week by two very distinguished organizations dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled. One is the Kessler Foundation and the other is the New Jersey Division Foundation of Disability Services.

Today we're going to look at two different but equally innovative businesses in New Jersey, both of which serve as a model for expanding job opportunities for the disabled. One is called Arthur and Friends. It's a business that grows themselves fresh produce at local farmers' markets and two area restaurants throughout the state.

The second business is actually a trio of services called Metro Shredding, Metro Scanning and Metro Digital Mail and they're all from Hudson Community Enterprises.

Both of these businesses are the result of a concept called Social Entrepreneurship and we're going to discuss this idea later in the program with the women driving these two businesses.

But if both of these enterprises were born in the conception of the social entrepreneurship, then both of these actually given life by funding from the Kessler Foundation and, of course, Kessler is well-known for the work it does to improve the lives of the disabled.

In addition to research and rehabilitation, Kessler also serves as a catalyst for innovative ideas like the ones we're going to discuss for the next hour.

To begin our discussion, let me first introduce Rodger DeRose, President and CEO of the Kessler Foundation, and let me also welcome Elaine Katz, Vice President of Grant Programs and Special Initiatives at Kessler. So, welcome to you both.

>> ELAINE KATZ: Thank you.

>> RODGER DeROSE: Thank you.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Rodger, I've noticed that in positions you held before you joined Kessler, you did a number of years with consumer giant, SC Johnson, and also with Arthur and Friends, for-profit sector jobs, and then you made a transition to where you were President and CEO of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. I believe it was in 2001?

>> RODGER DeROSE: That's correct, yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: You joined Kessler after that. I was wondering about your transition from the for-profit to the not-for-profit sector and why you did that.

>> RODGER DeROSE: You know, I felt, Ray, that after 30 years in the for-profit segment, that it was time to really do something that had a major social impact and to give back, and I had to look

to a number of different areas, including the health care area of non-profit, the arts and higher education and really decided to focus on the health care arena.

And when this opportunity came up at Kessler, I thought it was a wonderful way of helping to serve individuals that had disabilities that were trying to improve their lives, and it was a very strong match with the mission of Kessler Foundation and the great groundwork that they had done over the last 60 years as an organization.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Do you find that the experience you had in the private sector helps in the way that you do your job at Kessler?

>> RODGER DeROSE: There are certainly differences, Ray, but I really do feel that the disciplinary areas that you learn from a project management point of view, as well as from a discipline area, that you tend to focus on, whether that's finance or marketing or the project management years, that those areas do help you to become more effective in the world of the non-profit public charity areas.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Very good.

Elaine, I know one of your main responsibilities at Kessler is to implement, I guess, and monitor all the grant writing and

the grant programs at the foundation. And I was wondering if based on the last couple of years, how you've seen the activity go relative to the fact that the economy has been in tough shape.

Did you find that things are as active as they were? Have they slowed down? Are they picking up?

>> ELAINE KATZ: Thank you, Ray. As you know, I probably have the best job in the world because I get to give away money. But I would say over the past couple of years, we've seen an increasing demand from small community organizations that are really facing the struggles of the economy with the dip in public funding, as well as private donations. Some of these organizations are tapping into their savings and other resources and really hurting in the pinch of the economy.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And do you find that there are more or less organizations around than there were a few years ago? Have we lost some as a result of the economy?

>> ELAINE KATZ: Well, in our work in New Jersey, we pretty much have seen the same organizations around. We did, though, offer some of our local organizations the chance to have emergency grants last year and we probably gave out close to a quarter of a million dollars to save, primarily to save positions at local organizations that were facing cutbacks in their services. And

we didn't want to see that happen in the employment arena. This year it seems like it's picking up a little bit and things are holding steady.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So, Rodger, that could be a nice bridge to talk about the Transition to Work Program. And I thought maybe both you and Elaine could speak about that for a couple of minutes, especially in light of the fact that the economy being the way it's been and, of course, the high unemployment rates and everything, I'm sure that brought some extra challenges to doing this.

>> RODGER DeROSE: Sure, I'll be happy to start, Ray, and then Elaine can jump in, since this a program that she really started about five years ago.

But over the last five years, the foundation has invested about \$15 million in funding to these types of programs. We started in the New Jersey areas of sort of a test market to determine that the demonstration projects that we were involved in were working and then looking to find ways that we could expand beyond that.

But it's all about trying to find ways that we could create real value in terms of either career training for people with disabilities or actually starting to fund programs that created the business infrastructure so that other non-profit agencies

could create jobs for people with disabilities.

And that's what it's all been about, it's really trying to find ways we could create real jobs for real pay. And I think Elaine has really demonstrated the success of that initiative by the Board of Directors at the Kessler Foundation in terms of our determination to make this a reality.

>> ELAINE KATZ: Yeah, I think as you see in this economy, people with disabilities are often the first ones to be laid off because they're holding down some of the jobs that may be support jobs or secondary ancillary jobs within some corporations. And the opportunity to really fund programs and one of our goals, also, is to really train to sector occupations, which means looking at the jobs that are popular within a certain area of the country or area of the state and, for example, in New Jersey, we started a number of years ago a laboratory assistant training program because there are a lot of pharmaceutical companies in New Jersey.

And right now, that is the industry that's really starting to hire and trainees of that program are able to find jobs more easily than some of the other training programs.

The key in what we're doing is looking at not only opportunities in innovative ideas in the employment arena, but also where in the economy is the best fit and the future growth

that somebody with a disability may learn a trade or an occupation and have a future in a really good paying job.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: You both mentioned, of course, the fact that a lot of this work is centered on New Jersey now, but are there national implications behind this program?

>> RODGER DeROSE: Well, we hope so. We've certainly included that direction in our strategic plan. We're ruling out a number of approaches here over the next couple of years that will be more regional, but we've also expanded into programs that include North Carolina, Texas, Colorado Springs and Washington, D.C. So you're starting to see us advance beyond New Jersey now and it will most likely continue to see that trend over the next five years, Ray.

>> ELAINE KATZ: As far as training students, we do have a program. We work closely with the Washington Center in Washington D.C. and sends students from New Jersey to internships in the Metro Washington, D.C. area. So as Rodger mentioned, we are beginning to expand slowly but surely into not only New Jersey but New York and Pennsylvania areas, as far as grant making and looking to expand within the next three to five years more across the country.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Very good.

Now, one of the concepts, the main concepts I mentioned at the top of the show was this idea of social entrepreneurship. And I don't know if one of you want to take a few seconds to explain exactly what social entrepreneurship means and how it applies to the functions that you have going and the initiatives you're funding, that would be great.

>> ELAINE KATZ: I would be happy to do that, Ray. As you know, most people think of business as a for-profit enterprise and very little was really applied to the non-profit sector. What social entrepreneurship allows non-profits to do is really start a business that focuses on a social problem that may be for-profit or not-for-profit, but the idea is to focus the business, to manage a venture that really emphasizes some sort of social change. It can make a difference in the marketplace. It could be something that's innovative. It could be something that's similar to another business, but it does measure its success in the profit and return aspect of it.

What's it really done for the non-profit world has become -- earlier we talked about organizations using emergency funding and problems in generally raising money in this kind of economy. And what it does is that if it's a successful business -- and you'll hear about two of them today -- it can lend

an income stream to an organization that provides an additional source of funds for them to carry on their work.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So let's just get specific, then, for a minute relative to what we're discussing today when you talk about the fact of social entrepreneurship, you can look at and focus on solving a particular problem.

What's the particular problem we're looking to solve in this case? How could you define it?

>> ELAINE KATZ: The problem we're looking to solve is the underemployment of people with disabilities and the non-employment of people with disabilities.

The businesses we're highlighting today both focus on that population to bring skills, talent, and a sense of worth, people with disabilities learning new professions, new occupations in growing fields that will give them a future in not only positions and training within that particular organization but with an eye in moving on to more mainstream corporations and companies.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And what do you think the nature of this problem is? It can't all just be due to the economy in the last couple of years because I assume this program predated the recession we're coming through. So what's the source of this problem, do you think?

>> ELAINE KATZ: I think the source of the problem is typically people with disabilities have been seen as a group of not being able to learn certain skills to perform as others do in occupations. And there are ways, everybody has a different ability. We're taking a whole group that really has a spectrum of different issues and performance problems, but still, there are ways of carving out jobs, of developing technology on a position, adoptive technology that can be used in an occupation, that can allow a person to fully function and do either pieces of a job.

In other words, I know most people have heard about job sharing these days. There's something called job carve out, where you can take a certain level of a job that can be done by two or three different people.

The ultimate result is performance, and the ultimate goal is to make sure a person is successful and that has work that is meaningful to them and is able to be self-sufficient.

>> RODGER DeROSE: I would just add to that, Ray, I think Elaine summarized it, I would just add that there's a lot of employment myths, if you will, about hiring people with disabilities and they range, you know, from it being too much trouble to hire them. It ranges to that if they hire a person with a disability, that they

may be showing special favors towards those individuals. They worry about their insurance rates going up. They worry about a number of different things that are really myths.

And I think what we're demonstrating through the social entrepreneurship that Elaine talked about is that you can make strategic investments in other organizations that will help them to create the infrastructure that they need to be successful, to hire people with disabilities that can actually do the job, going back to what we talked about, doing real work for real pay and allowing them to grow not only in that job but gain the confidence that they can go on to other initiatives throughout their career.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright, great, Rodger, Elaine, thank you very much. We need to take a short break, but when we come back, we're going to discuss how this concept of social entrepreneurship has manifested itself in the story, actually an inspiring story of a company called Arthur and Friends, which is a business rooted in the fertile farmland of Western New Jersey and is now enjoying a healthy growth across the state. So stay with us. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

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>> RAY ZARDETTO: Welcome back to Disabilities at Work Radio here on VoiceAmerica's Business Network. This is brought to you by the Kessler Foundation and by the State of New Jersey's Division of Disability Services. I'm Ray Zardetto and I have been speaking with Rodger DeRose, President and CEO of the Kessler

Foundation, and Elaine Katz, Vice President of Grant Programs and Special Initiatives. We've been talking about the foundation's Transition to Work Program and from that, the concept of social entrepreneurship.

One of the businesses that's growing out of this concept is called Arthur and Friends. It is located in Northwestern New Jersey, or at least it started there. And those not familiar with the geography of New Jersey or who may be under the impression New Jersey is nothing but the New Jersey Turnpike and a bunch of chemical plants packed tightly together. Actually, the Northwestern part of the state features some of the best and most fertile farmland you are going to see anywhere. And here to attest to that is the Program Director for Arthur and Friends, Wendie Blanchard. Welcome, Wendie.

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Thank you very much.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Would you agree about my characterization about the Northwest part of New Jersey?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Yes. It's absolutely a beautiful place to live. It's one of those secrets we don't tell too many people about it. But the thing about hydroponics -- and that's how we grow our produce -- is we're not just growing it in fields. We're actually growing it in inside greenhouses, and that's how we got

our expansion, is going into urban areas all over New Jersey which we may be more famous for.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Why don't you explain for everybody what the concept of hydroponics is.

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Well, hydroponics is Latin for water working and it's really not a new method, but it's having kind of a rebirth now when we look at the impact that agriculture makes in terms of the environment and when we look at ways in which we can grow produce year round.

It's a re-circulating system. It means we're not watering fields. We have a tank that waters through a series of tubes and gullies and keeps the produce growing constantly in a nutrient rich bath. We use no herbicides or pesticides and, in fact, all of our produce is grown on tables which is particularly nice for anyone with a disability and is confined to a wheelchair.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm very interested because I would think if I were to think through what kind of businesses you might start up, thinking in terms of providing opportunities for the disabled, I'm not sure that farming or growing produce and everything would have come to top of mind like that. How did we get to the point to where Arthur and Friends was considered as a business?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Well, it was really about five years ago, I started considering what I would like to do in terms of, maybe, that cameo career. I had been a school administrator and a college professor and I kind of looked at what I enjoyed doing and knowing that I didn't want to sit behind a computer and desk, and what I enjoyed was growing things.

I also very much wanted to work with the disabled population who we all recognize that, you know, all those schools have many great programs.

Once they become adults and are no longer in the school environment, they often lose their socialization and they have very, very limited opportunities for additional training, additional socialization and become increasingly even more isolated.

I know the pleasures and therapeutic value of growing things, and I thought this was a perfect thing. After all, we all need to eat, too, so it did have a certain promise in that area.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: You started with one growing area, one greenhouse?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Yes. Very generously, we received the use of a greenhouse that was not being used on a farm and through the funding, initial startup funding from Norwest Cap and Kessler

Foundation, we piloted our first program.

We had six people with disabilities and they ranged from autism to cerebral palsy, to people who suffer traumatic brain injuries. And it was evident very quickly that this was just a wonderful, wonderful working environment. It was cheerful, bright, and everybody was very capable of doing the work.

That inspired community organizers in Sussex County, New Jersey, specifically at the State Fairgrounds, to come and take a look at what we were doing and invited us to use their state-of-the-art greenhouse at no cost. So they donated that space. We relocated there which allotted us to expand tremendously and offer the opportunity to a lot more people.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So take us through what a day would be like at Arthur and Friends if we were working with you or for you. What's the day like?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Well, every day--we always say there's a miracle and it's always a good day at the greenhouse. It starts at about 10:00. Everybody arrives, transportation is provided through a variety of different services, public transportation, private. Group homes have their own transportation and people all arrive ready to go to work.

Everybody sets a personal goal for the week and we have team

goals, things we need to accomplish as a team as well as individually. So no one comes in thinking, well what am I going to do today. We have a specific four module training program and this allows people to assess their abilities their skills, see their growth and always have a diverse and unique opportunity to work.

So somebody might come in and say, today I'm doing seeds and I'm planting those. And some may say, oh, I'm doing transplanting and some people might be working on facilities, cleaning and making sure all of the many, many micro tubes are all running properly. Some people will be doing harvesting. We have people that are working in retail. It's a very, very busy place to work.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: About how many people work there now?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: We have 31 people right now and they do not all work full time. Most of them, because of transportation issues, work from 10:00 in the morning until about 2, 2:30, and some until 3:00, and they all have a full range of disabilities and abilities. We consider ourselves re-abled, not disabled.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: What do you grow, out of curiosity?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: We grow several different kinds of hydroponic lettuce. We grow five different kinds of herbs, we

grow Asian greens, which are very popular, we grow Swiss chard and among our herbs, we have prize-winning basil and arugula so we're proud of that.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And you sell them directly via farmers markets and other distribution places?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Well, farmers markets are really not our number one place. Although, now that the warm weather is coming, we will have a presence at several of them, but we primarily sell them to restaurants and to individuals.

Certain companies will e-mail us or fax us an order and say, okay, so and so will come over at lunchtime and pick up the order for everyone in the office. We have some wonderful restaurants who have standing orders with us, and so we work out our schedule accordingly to make sure they get the produce they need for both special events and the regular customers.

We have two people that buy our produce specifically for cooking, making quiches and different kinds of soups. And we also have lots of ethnic restaurants interested in something specific, like they want a certain kind of basil or a certain kind of cilantro.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And so, for area restaurants that you deal with, what's the business case you make that they should consider

buying from Arthur and Friends as opposed to whatever other distributors they've used in the past?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Well, I think mostly people buy it first on their produce. We kind of have this little saying we use. We say, "Try our lettuce and you'll never forget us." We kind of get in the back door when they realize everybody who is there is disabled, they suddenly have a warm feeling and say, gee, I want to help and really want to be part of this. We're willing to pay the price and work with your schedule and accommodate what you grow.

Quite frankly, I've never had any restaurant say no to us, and we're very compelling. We invite them to come in, pick out their produce. We'll custom grow what they want and we have more to offer than your box truck coming in with vegetables from California or Mexico.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: About how many restaurants do you supply now?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: About 13 for our location at -- actually a little bit more now. The country clubs are starting to opening up for the season. But in our area, we really try to keep within 50 miles of our area and with our expansions into five additional counties, we have already made contacts with area restaurants and it looks very, very promising that we'll have more than enough

produce.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: You and I were talking before the show about some of the things that happen on a day-to-day basis at Arthur and Friends and some of the antidotes of success and actually, I think inspiring stories.

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Yeah, there's always sort of a miracle at Arthur and Friends every day. I'll give you one story. There was a woman who had read about this and brought her husband into the greenhouse to see what is a little like Disney World inside there. And he was a conventional gardener and was kind of looking to scan all of this. And whoever the woman in charge, who was giving tours that day, because people come in and say what is this? So if anyone comes in today, you need to get up from your chair and give a tour.

It was Colleen's day and she got up and went to the couple and said, this is hydroponics and started to explain. And he was saying, what's this, what's that? She said, you'll have to describe it to me and pointing across the greenhouse, it's right over there, tall, kind of impatient. And she said, "I'm sorry. I'm blind. I can't see. You'll need to describe this to me."

He looked and said, "Well, how do you do this if you're blind?" And she said, "I do this very well." That's the kind of attitude

that we really foster. We really want people to be proud of who they are and what they do.

It's very exciting to have a little edge on the technology to be doing something that nobody else is doing.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So you mentioned that you have expanded into five other counties in New Jersey, now?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Right, right. As we speak, the greenhouse is going up in Orange, New Jersey on a lot through our collaboration with Hands, Inc. and Garden State Urban Farms, and that's a wonderful location in a residential area. We have a greenhouse that is getting ready to be put up in the next week, I think, I hope next week, in Hackettstown, New Jersey, that is Warren County.

And that's a wonderful thing because it's an existing garden supply place but they were finding the challenging economy, that they were not using their greenhouse, came to us, we set up a collaboration through the funding from Kessler. We were able to buy the new greenhouse and put up a new thing so that will be opening in June.

We have two that are going up in Somerset right now and that's exciting because it's going on the grounds of the county park, the 450 acres in Somerset.

So community property is being used to do good and we have already got 100 people on our waiting list for those locations. So that's very exciting. The city of Newark, as a matter of fact, tomorrow I hope, will be finalizing those details and putting three to ten greenhouses there which will allow for training and employment of the disabled, as well as providing locally grown produce in a food desert.

Next year we have bridge to New Jersey, which is a more urban area in the southern part of the state, also funded by Kessler, and that's exciting because we'll be collaborating with Rutgers University with their horticulture therapist.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And so, if somebody wants information about how to get involved with this program or how to expand it into their own particular states, can you give us some contact information?

>> WENDIE BLANCHARD: Absolutely. You can go to our website. We'll soon have a website that's ArthurandFriends.org and .net, but it's not up right now. But currently you can go to Norwescap.org, that's N-O-R-W-E-S-C-A-P.org and there's all kinds of information, and my personal e-mail and phone number is there.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Great. Well, we have to take another break,

but when we return we'll expand our discussion to talk about another great story of social entrepreneurial success. This is a service business now in the different part of New Jersey and it's a business services enterprise. It's quite a story as well so stay with us.

And before we go to break, let me invite all of you who listen to Disabilities at Work Radio to join our Twitter team, our tweam, at DisabilitiesAt, and also friend us at Facebook at Disabilities at Work. Thanks for listening. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

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power to endorse supportive businesses at the Disabilities at Work website at [www.disabilitiesatwork.org](http://www.disabilitiesatwork.org). When it comes to business you'll find the experts here, VoiceAmerica Business Network.

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>> RAY ZARDETTO: We are back on VoiceAmerica's Business Network. This is Disabilities at Work Radio and I'm Ray Zardetto.

Today is sponsored by the Kessler Foundation, which is dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled. It does so through the rehabilitation research done by the Kessler Foundation Research Center and through the work of the Kessler Program Center which prepares the disabled for the demands of the workplace which we have been talking about here today. For more information, you can visit their website at [www.kesslerfoundation.org](http://www.kesslerfoundation.org).

Also sponsoring our show today is the New Jersey of Disabilities Services, part of the state's division of human services. The division focuses on helping people who have become

disabled as adults so they can live more independently in their communities.

And Disabilities at Work Radio thanks both the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disability Services for their consideration in sponsoring this week's show.

We've been speaking, of course, to the Kessler Foundation throughout today's show because of the catalyst they are and many of the ideas and initiatives for helping the disabled and we talked in the last segment about Arthur and Friends.

And now we're going to talk about another business, somewhat different but just as unique in its own way. I would like you to meet Maureen Wallicer of Hudson Community Enterprises, and they're responsible for Metro Shredding, Metro Scanning and Metro Digital Mail, the three businesses that we're going to talk about.

And so, Maureen, I'll let you start off by describing exactly what these businesses are, what they do and how they got started.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Thank you.

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: It's a pleasure to be here. Our businesses are a little different. We're in Jersey City, which is now a land of back offices and financial service institutions and I guess about seven years ago we began to look at the whole issue of employment and a lot of the individuals with disabilities

that we were working with weren't able to access those jobs in financial services industry or the back office area.

So we did a lot of research and based on the research, we identified the area of records management as one that we felt would be right for development. About seven years ago, as a result of that research, we launched our first business in that area which is a mobile document shredding business.

The business involved a 25-foot truck with a driver and two helpers. And basically what we do is we go to a business. We evaluate what they have there that needs to be destroyed. We do the destruction on the truck and when we finish, we give the business a certificate of destruction.

After a year of operating that business, we began to learn that industry and were ready to launch our second business, which was Metro Scanning. With the assistance of the Kessler Foundation, we received a grant and we got the business off the ground.

What was great was that we picked a business in the same business area so we already had a customer base that, prior to development of the business, we were able to talk about the new business.

Metro Scanning was launched. It's now in its third year, and that business has 120 people working full time in the business.

And with that under our belt, we developed Metro Digital Mailroom Management, which, with the assistance of the Kessler Foundation again, we were able to do significant business research and get the business off the ground.

The businesses are doing well. The Metro Shredding business has a staff of ten. The Metro Scanning has a staff of 120, and the Digital Mail business has a staff of 20. We work from 8 a.m. in the morning until 8 at night. Fortunately, because we have such a great business, we need to have a second shift, which is a great problem. All of our employees are disabled. They come from various parts of Hudson County and they work a full day.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: As a matter of fact, I was going to ask the same question I was asking Wendie before. What would it be like to experience a day of work at one of these three businesses?

>> WENDIE WALLISER: The business here is very hectic. When you walk in the front door, you'll see 120 people arriving, ready, willing and able to work. They get to work immediately. They spend their day with a box of paper, removing paper clips and staples and preparing the documents to be scanned.

After they're scanned, they then sit down at a computer and by using their keyboarding skills, put in place a mechanism for the end user to retrieve the documents that have been scanned.

After the documents are scanned, you as a user can sit down at your computer, turn it on and retrieve whatever you want without walking into that file room area, where you ever put anything. Our workers are extremely motivated from the time they get in the morning until the time they leave.

In fact, our very first employee had been unemployed for 20 years, suffered from depression and alcoholism, came to work for us and went from not working for that long period of time to actually working a 12-hour day because we had so much work.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I would expect you probably have other anecdotes you could share as well. But before we get to those, because you are in Jersey City and Hudson County which is right outside of New York City, very highly congested area, a very competitive area, how do you market a business like this when you have such competition to deal with all throughout the county and in that whole area of the state?

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: We have a lot of competition and basically, the quality of our work is what sells us. When we approach a customer in terms of potentially doing business, we don't plead, saying, oh, please come and give us business because you'll help people with disabilities.

We say, our price is competitive. We do a quality job and when

all is said and done at the end of the day, you've helped individuals with disabilities receive assistance and job training so they can go out and get a job. And that seems to sell it.

A lot of the customers that potentially approach us, when they hear that, it gives us a little competitive edge.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And, so you were saying before that you brought in one person who had not worked in a while and suffering from depression and alcoholism and obviously getting involved in your business has been helpful for that person.

You have, I'm sure, some other success anecdotes to share as well. I really think those are really what the bottom line is, and much more so than the bottom line of the numbers, it's the bottom line of the human impact.

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: One of the policies we put in place when we first opened the business was to promote from within and one of the very first individuals that began our training program was accepted into the business. She worked for, I guess, about a year, doing document imaging. She became so competent that when we needed a supervisor, we immediately offered her the position.

She's been a supervisor now for, I guess, two years. She's received several promotions and she is supporting a family with

two children and she is able to live independently, and she is able to go home at the end of the day and feel really good that she can support her family now on her own.

Previously she had been dependent. She had been receiving public assistance, and this was the first job she had almost had ever had. So that's a great story.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Yeah. Well, and just curious, how do you select the employees that you want to bring in to use for any one of the three businesses?

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: We work closely with other community based organizations here in Hudson County. We have a very strong outreach program. We actually go out into the community continuously to market the program. We've developed a one week evaluation to find out if someone has the skills to work in the business, following that, we do a nine week training program.

During that nine week training program, the individual is trained in all aspects of document management, and after that two weeks in the training program, the person actually begins to work and earn a salary while they're being trained.

When they finish the training program, they then go into the business. It's worked out really well. We've had the program in place, the training program, a couple of years and each year

we tweak it so that the candidates are ready, willing and able to work the minute they finish the training.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And so, just based on the levels of success you've described here so far, do you see any plans in the near future for expanding outside of Hudson County?

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: Actually, we do work outside of Hudson County. We have a group of 20 individuals that are based at a government agency in Essex County. They leave here every day from our program in Jersey City. They go to Newark and work a full eight hour day there at the governmental agency and come here to Jersey City at the end of the day and that group is continuing to grow.

We market our services aggressively to the various governmental entities surrounding Hudson County and our goal is that we will have a presence in the adjoining counties shortly.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And much like Arthur and Friends, because you are at least New Jersey focused as a business right now, do you see this as something that could be applicable to other businesses or other enterprises looking to start up these kinds of things in other states and other counties?

>> MAUREEN WALLISE: Most definitely. There's not a day that goes by that we don't hear about federal regulations pertaining

to how documents are handled, stored and destroyed. The emerging health care reform is seeking to have physicians' offices, clerical functions go paperless. So hopefully, this will offer tremendous opportunities across the country, actually. We have actually been in touch with other organizations from as far as way as Washington State who are researching similar areas right now.

So I see this as a really high growth area.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And if another enterprise or someone who is interested in some more information on how to do this, how can they contact you?

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: We have a website, it's [www.hudsoncommunity.org](http://www.hudsoncommunity.org) and the information is at the website in terms of specific telephone numbers and the like.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: That's great. Alright, thank you, Maureen. We need to take one more break and when we come back, we're going to continue our discussion with all four of our guests to discuss the concept of social entrepreneurship a little bit more, how we can move forward and even some of the potential pitfalls to watch out for. Stay with us, I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

>> SPEAKER: Whether the market is up or down or if you're

looking to improve your portfolio, our experts are ready to talk to you. Call now, toll free (866)472-5790 that's (866)472-5790. VoiceAmerica Business Network.

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>> SPEAKER: From the board room to you, this is VoiceAmerica Business Network. You are listening to Disabilities at Work Radio. We welcome questions and comments from our listening audience, what you can send to us on Twitter, at DisabilitiesAt, or on our Facebook site, Disabilities at Work. Also, visit [Disabilitiesatwork.org](http://Disabilitiesatwork.org). Welcome back.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And welcome back to Disabilities at Work Radio. Remember that Disabilities at Work Radio can be heard each Wednesday at noon Eastern Time on VoiceAmerica's Business

Network.

So at this time let me welcome back all four guests for our final segment today; Rodger DeRose, President and CEO of the Kessler Foundation, Elaine Katz, Vice President of the Grants Program and Special Initiatives at Kessler; Maureen Wallicer, President and CEO of Hudson Community Enterprises; and Wendie Blanchard, the Program Director for Arthur and Friends.

And I would like to just throw out a couple of questions, a couple of issues and have any or all of you give us your perspective on them.

And one of them is just in terms of the disabled in the workplace. How have any of you seen a change, since most of you have been in this now at least for the last decade or so, how has it changed in the last ten years for the better or for worse? Rodger, why don't you start?

>> RODGER DeROSE: Well, I would say that not a great deal has changed. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is still significantly high. The welcoming of people with disabilities in the business community is still not at a high level and so there's still a great deal of work that needs to be done.

We are undertaking a major study that will be released this

year with a survey that we're doing with 400 companies around the United States, throughout the United States, that will really investigate how the needle has moved in the last 15 years with regards to employing people with disabilities across corporate America so that we can better understand the efforts in recruiting and training and in retaining careers for people with disabilities in corporate America.

The one thing that has changed, I would say, is that with the passing of the ADA Act, there is certainly less obstacles in the way in terms of opening doors for individuals with disabilities to at least have an opportunity for jobs.

But once they get there, the biggest issue is how an employer reacts to an individual with a disability. And those are the kind of things we're demonstrating through the programming we're undertaking, that persons with disabilities certainly have abilities and that they can perform most jobs if they receive the proper training and are given the opportunity.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: It does seem as though the attitude is still an obstacle here. The general attitude of either how people or how employers see the people with disabilities. How does that change? How do we bring that change about?

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: I think, for Arthur and Friends, the

change has come as a result of people having an opportunity to really interact with disabled people. Generally, when you go into a business, whether it's a store or whatever, your attitude is sort of that you don't really look directly at the person you're working with. I think that the people, one of the first things we do is teach the disabled how to advocate for themselves and speak up and say, I have something to offer, and I cannot be ashamed or to feel they have to make any apologies for their disability.

I think the first change is in the individual themselves and once you have more opportunity for interaction, you start to see people, their abilities. You get to see them as human beings and a lot of the stereotypes disappear.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: As long as we're talking about the businesses then again, one of the questions that came to my mind as I was listening to both Wendie and Maureen describe the success of their business and both of these did at least, I think, begin to see the light of day as non-profits, how do you grow a business and manage this kind of success and maintain the status of a non-profit business?

>> ELAINE KATZ: We've actually licensed our curriculum and we have an opportunity for people to replicate. We encourage other

non-profits to learn from our success and replicate our program. That's the biggest step for growing the business.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Is it possible you could get to the point you're having too much success, though?

>> ELAINE KATZ: I feel that way almost every day. To be honest, this is the third interview today. So, yes, there's a lot going on. We have out in Portland, Oregon, now there's an organization that will be replicating this program. We consider that a success, which is why we decided licensing it is a good idea. If we put together all of our knowledge and information to a way people could replicate it, it would have a turnkey format rather than having something that has to be supervised by one individual on a daily basis.

We're promoting from within, also, so these people who have worked there now know how to run this and do so quite well.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Was that Elaine? I'm sorry.

>> ELAINE KATZ: Yes, Ray, I was going to say your question brings up an interesting point, which is, you know, how do you establish one of these businesses? And I think the reason why Arthur and Friends and the Hudson suite of businesses are successful is because they started with a business plan and actually had a business mindset and brought in collaborators who

are from the business community. Because, as you know, so many small businesses tend to fail and I think there is - you know, before social entrepreneurship business can be started by a non-profit agency, there has to be an agreement, really, among the Board of Trustees, a source of capital and a number of steps that have to be in place before you can even launch this type of business.

So I think careful business planning and working through the strategies to make it a long-term effort is very important.

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: This is Maureen, if I could add something.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Sure.

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: Of the things that we did very earnestly in the beginning is that we did a lot of homework in terms of the business plan. We did a lot of research. And one of the risks that we assumed very early on was we made a commitment to hire people that had technical skills, strong technical skills to run these businesses.

Many years ago, we got into the area of janitorial services and we had one of our social workers run that business. If you're going to run a business and it's going to be taken seriously, you really need to have technical people to run the business and to

manage it on a day-to-day basis.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So I assume if anybody who was thinking along the lines of starting one of these businesses and were to ask you for one or two, make sure you do these things first, that would be one of them?

>> MAUREEN WALLISER: Yes, definitely.

>> ELAINE KATZ: I would have to agree a hundred percent.

>> RODGER DeROSE: It seems, Ray, that what you're basically hearing here is that you can have the greatest business plan conceptually, but if you don't execute really well, that you're going to still face the same difficulties that every other business has. And it so comes down to really good execution, once you've demonstrated that you have a business plan that everyone is behind.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And I assume Kessler is interested in the success of this program and seeing it expand beyond the two businesses we talked about here. I know there are other initiatives going on as well. But what would you say to somebody who may be listening to this show today but is a little hesitant to move this forward given the economic conditions we're just coming out of?

>> RODGER DeROSE: Well, I would say that if they're thinking

about starting a business that really focuses on people with disabilities, that they should give a great deal of thought to the concept that they want to enter into from a business strategy point of view and then make sure that they have the resources that are correctly positioned to match what they're really trying to do and then secure the funding.

The funding can come from a number of different entities, as Elaine said, in terms of collaborations within the community and national organizations as well.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I would also then ask either Roger or Elaine, based on, say, comparisons to five years ago, if the level of funding available for these kinds of things is the same, less or more?

>> ELAINE KATZ: I think if you're looking through private foundations, it's probably the same as in the past. I think if you're going for matching funding from a commercial lender, I think you're going to find scrutiny on these types of projects, but I still think there are a number of foundations and other sources of private funding and there is some government funding available, too, through different agencies that are looking to fund businesses, especially for entrepreneurs that serve veterans and our returning soldiers. There are a number of

initiatives out there for that nationally as well. There are a number of foundations that focus on social entrepreneurs and businesses.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And last question for Rodger, since we have heard Maureen and Wendie describe the success of their businesses as they expand them and move them forward. But I'm wondering from the point of view of the Kessler Foundation, how would you define or describe or recognize success in one of these enterprises?

>> RODGER DeROSE: Well, I would say that the hiring of people with disabilities is fundamental, obviously, to the cause that we're trying to fulfill. But the success, really, is from a measurement point of view, is the outcomes of the business itself being successful from a concept point of view, the hiring of individuals with disabilities, as well as a sustaining model that is going to carry them into the future so that they don't have to rely just on funding from foundations, from private individuals, that there's a business model that actually allows them to succeed in terms of showing a bottom line that they can reinvest from the funding that they're getting from the business opportunity back into their own business.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Great. Well, I want to thank my guests today, Rodger DeRose, Elaine Katz, Maureen Walliser and Wendie Blanchard

and I appreciate your perspectives today. I thought it was a very interesting and informative discussion and let me also thank this week's sponsors again, the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disability Services.

Next Wednesday at noon Eastern Time, Disabilities at Work Radio will be back with another show, again exploring ideas, innovations, and initiatives involving the workplace and people with disabilities. Until then, I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

>> SPEAKER: Thanks for listening to Disabilities at Work. Become part of our team on Twitter at DisabilitiesAt and friend us on Facebook at Disabilities at Work. Check out our website at [www.disabilitiesatwork.org](http://www.disabilitiesatwork.org) and join us next week on Wednesday 9 a.m. Pacific/noon Eastern Time for the next Disabilities at Work Radio show.