

Retailers rush to West Village; top residential brokerages

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Vol. XLII, No. 10 www.crainny.com NEW YORK BUSINESS® March 5-11, 2001 Price: \$2.50

SMALL BUSINESS

Media designer tries for hit by selling her own product

'Not For Tourists Guide' aids natives

BY MICHELLE LEDER

THREE YEARS AGO, JANE Pirono decided the time had come to get serious about her business.

After several years of producing educational CDs for clients ranging from Memorial Sloan-

Kettering Cancer Center to Nickelodeon, she decided to try to eventually develop and market her own ideas. First, though, she had to kick assorted free-lancers and a half-dozen computers out of her East Village apartment and rent a proper office.

Last summer, the first product of that new resolve was born, a compact black book called *Not For Tourist: Guide to Manhattan*. The volume is nothing less than a sleekly designed, full-color guide to everything from the lighting schedule of the Empire State Building to a map of Central Park, to Web addresses and phone numbers for ferry services, to full breakdowns on

the 10 branches of the Long Island Railroad (with a helpful note about the LIRR's policy on pets).

"Manhattan is an enormous city, but it's really like 25 separate cities," explains Rob Tallia, Ms. Pirono's business partner, who has written a couple of how-to books. "If you go out of the neighborhood that you know, it's like going to another city."

For Happy Mazza Media, the company Ms. Pirono named after her grandfather, Dominic "Happy" Mazza, *NFT* looks



LITTLE BLACK BOOK: Happy Mazza Media's new edition.

like a gamble with legs. With nothing in the way of marketing beyond thousands of free copies sent off to real estate agents and others, the book sold several thousand copies at \$19.95 each.

While the proceeds were not quite enough to cover the rent on Happy Mazza's Chinatown offices, they still accounted for about 25% of the company's roughly \$400,000 in revenues last year. More important, those sales have inspired Ms. Pirono and her partner to plan other books for other markets.

"Of course, this is very risky and, of course, we're nervous and stressed out, but we're not getting completely out of the business we started," says Ms. Pirono.

Appealing to impulse

This year, they are shooting for \$300,000 in revenues just from the book. An updated 2001 edition, which added several pages on the boroughs beyond Manhattan, went on sale recently for \$16.95—\$3 cheaper than the first edition—a decision made to help make the book more of an impulse purchase.

To speed the process, free copies have been doled out liberally. The pair, for example, is working with area real estate agents and hotels, which have handed out copies of the guide to VIP guests. "It gives them a feeling of being an insider in the city," says James Felzenberg, director of purchasing for the Sheraton and Westin hotels of New York.

By the end of the year, there will also be *NFT* editions covering Los Angeles, Chicago and Fairfield County, Conn.—where Ms. Pirono grew up. To minimize her risks, Ms. Pirono is also careful to keep costs on her books to a bare minimum. In fact, much of the material that she uses she gets free: from maps of Manhattan bus routes to the seating arrangement in Madison Square Garden.

Growing demand

To compile it all, Ms. Pirono uses a group of free-lancers, many of whom are her students at Ramapo College in New Jersey or at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn where she teaches multimedia design. She drew on her own design skills to lay out the volume.

Joe Wedick, a buyer at national book distributor Bookazine Co. says *NFT* has become a regularly stocked item for him. "I can't wait to get my hands on the other guides," he says.

Is the book the next *Zagat*, the restaurant guide that grew from a hand-copied list in New York into a hugely successful international guide business? It's certainly the goal, Ms. Pirono admits.

"It took *Zagat* a while to get off the ground, so it's a little too early to say," says Noel Pasco, buyer for northeast regional books at Barnes & Noble, which began stocking *NFT* last year. Still, Mr. Pasco says the book has been doing very well at area stores. ■