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# BUSINESS PLANS

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A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS BUSINESS INDUSTRY

## Vision Homes is finding success

While everyone else is doom and gloom, we love Southwest Florida. We think it is a great place to be long term.

— said Jamie Pirrello, managing partner of Vision Homes

**BY MICHELLE L. START**  
Florida Weekly Correspondent

In a market where other builders are going under, Vision Homes is finding success.

The company opened in July 2006, just as the market had begun to turn. It employs 13 full-time employees and two part-timers.

"The majority of our business is coming from customers whose builders have gone out of business or unable to get the homes built," said Jamie Pirrello, managing partner of the Fort Myers-based Vision Homes USA.



Pirrello

In many cases, Pirrello said the customers had contracted with a builder, taken out a construction loan and then were left without a home or one that was partially built, and some of the money was gone. Some of the homes have mechanics liens on them.

In one case, a woman recently came into their office in tears. She had taken out the loan, money had been spent and she owed the bank, but had nothing to show for it.

"This is what I call heavy lifting," Pirrello said.

"Each case is unique. The bad news is that we can't help everyone. But, for those we can help, we get the homes under contract and have them built in about four months. The good news is we are pulling permits and getting homes built. While everyone else is doom and gloom, we love Southwest Florida. We think it is a great place to be long term."

Pirrello calls those situations Rescue Homes and it accounts for about 70 percent of the company's business. During the first year of operation, Vision Homes built 45 homes and is aiming for 50 this year.

"I like actually helping people," said Pirrello. "It is helping also to build our business. We now have lenders who are referring customers to us."

Most of the remaining buyers were



COURTESY PHOTO

**Vision Homes does not build spec homes. Each of their homes is custom built specifically for the new owner.**



PHOTO MICHELLE START

**Jose Angel is employed by Vision Homes.**

priced out of the market when homes soared above \$300,000.

"These are our working families," said Steve Nice, chief operating officer. "These are nurses, school teachers and electricians.



PHOTO MICHELLE START

**One of Vision Homes under construction.**

These are the folks who make the economy work."

In fact, last week a single mom who works as a teacher came into the office and signed a contract. She looked through the

16 plans, selected upgrades and is expected to be in her new home shortly after Christmas.

There are also a few buyers who are purchasing more luxurious retirement homes. So, how do they make it work?



Nice

For one, Vision Homes does not build spec homes. Each of their homes is custom built specifically for the new owner. They don't own land, either.

The end-result is that customers purchasing now are getting reduced rates on

lots. The majority of the construction being done by Vision Homes is for a 2,200 square-foot \$185,000 model. One customer recently bought that model and a lot for \$200,000 but the home was appraised at \$245,000, which created instant equity, Pirrello said.

The company currently has 20 homes under construction.

Pirrello said they begin four to five new homes a month.

"Call me old fashioned, but it is like an assembly line," he said. "We only earn our keep if we build homes, so we have to build every day."

Eventually the company hopes to expand and begin building subdivisions, but the pricing is still too stiff, Pirrello said.

"We're doing some things differently," said Nice. "Jamie's vision is for homebuilders to be good neighbors. We keep our job sites clean. We keep the inside of the house clean. We know the customer will come over and take a peak every chance they get. We're trying to make homebuilding a fun experience for the customer."

As a part of that goal, photos are taken as the home is being constructed and customers are able to view the work through photographs online.

"It is not about getting rich tomorrow, but about building our business long term," said Pirrello. ■

## Entrepreneur opens first Little Caesars Veterans Program Store

Fort Myers store first in nation under new program

**SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY**

Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc. recently opened the first store under the Little Caesars Veterans Program, as U.S. military veteran and Little Caesars franchisee Martin Lorenz opened his doors for business at 11600 Gladiolus Dr. in Gladiolus Gateway Plaza, in Fort Myers.

"I'm proud to be a franchisee with a company that recognizes the contributions veterans have made to our country," said Lorenz. "Little Caesars has given me incredible support and a unique opportunity to open the company's first Little Caesars Veterans Program store. I am honored to be part of such an important program and look forward to seeing several more veterans open their stores this year."

Offering qualified, honorably discharged U.S. military veterans such as Lorenz \$10,000 in discounts and credits, and service-disabled veterans benefits of up to \$68,000, the industry-leading program provides business

opportunities to those who have served in the U.S. military.

Since launching on Veterans Day 2006, interest has remained high for the Little Caesars Veterans Program. Currently, more than 1,100 inquires have been made about the program and 12 veterans have been approved to be Little Caesars franchisees.

"With qualified veterans such as Martin joining the Little Caesars team, the Little Caesars Veterans Program is off to a great start as we continue to offer this special group the opportunity to start a new career," said David Scirvano, president, Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc. "Combined with his professional background, the skills Martin honed in the military such as teamwork, dedication and a familiarity with processes will help him be an effective Little Caesars franchisee."

A Vietnam War era veteran, Lorenz joined Little Caesars as an experienced entrepreneur. He has owned and operated businesses in the restaurant and real estate industries.

Entering a new phase in his professional life, Lorenz relishes the opportunity to be part of a proven system.

"I am at a point in my life where I want to make an investment in which I can feel confident that I will receive quality support from an established organization," said Lorenz. "Little Caesars has given me the support I, and Veterans with less business experience, need. The training also showed me the unique processes that will allow me to provide a high quality product at a great value to the Ft. Myers community."

Lorenz has partnered with his wife, Sherrie, and colleague, Fritz Andress, and plans to open additional Little Caesars locations in the Fort Myers area. ■

The Center for Veterans Enterprise (part of the Department of Veterans Affairs), Marine For Life (an organization that helps Marines and Sailors transition to civilian life), and the International Franchise Association (through its VetFran program) are



PHOTO PRNEWSFOTO/LITTLE CAESAR ENTERPRISES, INC.

**Ron Thomas, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning for Veterans Affairs, celebrates the opening of the first store under the Little Caesars Veterans Program with U.S. Veteran, Martin Lorenz and his business partners, Sherrie Lorenz and Fritz Andress. The industry leading Little Caesars Veterans Program provides business opportunities to those who have served in the U.S. military.**

points of contact for the Little Caesars Veterans Program. They can provide information about the requirements and qualifications of becoming a Little Caesars franchisee.