

Handicap doesn't deter video-store owners

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CHATEAUGAY — Norman and Rachel Karp, owners of Video Storm in Chateaugay, were extremely surprised when they had been chosen as the New York State Small Business Development Center Start-Up Business of the Year.

Their lives together lately have seemed more like a roller coaster.

Norman had been a chef for 17 years but decided it was time to move back to the North Country. He and Rachel had just started dating when a serious car accident left Norman with injuries that nearly crippled him and robbed him of most of his vision.

"It was a real test of our relationship," he said. "I was six months in rehab and the doctors told me I wouldn't walk again but I would get my sight back. But when it was all said and done, I can walk with a brace but can only see shadows."

Suddenly Norman had to set new goals. His first goal was to walk down the aisle when he married Rachel. One year after the accident, Norman did just that with his new bride.



Norman and Rachel Karp, owners of Video Storm in Chateaugay, are glad they decided to open a business in the small downtown area. After Norman lost most of his vision and mobility in a car accident, the couple had to change their plans for a restaurant and opened the video and DVD store.
Staff Photo/Susan Tobias

His next challenge was to figure out what he could do for an income, now that he had lost most of his sight and a lot of his mobility. He had always wanted to open a restaurant, and the couple had business

plans drawn up to do so through the Small Business Development Center at Plattsburgh State, which offers small-business counseling, training and guidance without charge to hopeful and established small businesses in upstate counties.

Store offers wide variety of video, DVD selections

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CHATEAUGAY — Video Storm, soon to celebrate its first anniversary in business, has more than 4,000 video and DVD selections to offer their customers.

"We also sell pre-viewed movies," said Rachel Karp, owner with her husband, Norman. "But we don't carry adult movies, only G through R ratings."

While going over names for the business, the couple decided to include Storm, Rachel's middle name and a family name in her line for generations, thus Video Storm.

As a way to promote family time for their customers and the community, they have a Wednesday special that includes video rental, a two-liter soda selection and two packages of popcorn for \$5.49.

Their Web site, www.tornadoclub.net, carries detailed information about soon-to-be-released movies, top rentals and movie inventory. They also have video games for Play Station 2.

Scheduled to be released by June 6 are "Glory Road," "Running Scared," "Underworld: Evolution," "Three Burials of Melquides Estrade" and "Firewall."

On June 13, new releases will be "End of the Spear," "Aquamarine," "The World's Fastest Indian," "Pink Panther," "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang" and "16 Blocks."

Norman said most people who come into the business don't know that he's visually impaired and it hasn't stopped him from recommending his favorite movies, which includes lots of older films.

Norman and Rachel thought they had a plan, but the accident changed all that.

"We decided a restaurant would have been too much for me to run alone," said Rachel. "So we went back to SBDC and they re-worked our business plan. I don't think we could have done it without them."

After several businesses had closed in downtown Chateaugay, the couple researched what would work for them and be attractive to customers. With Norman's love of movies as a foundation, a grant from the Commission for the Blind, a loan from Adirondack Economic Development Corp. and their own money, they made a decision to open Video Storm on July 1, 2005.

"We've had positive feedback from both summer people and year-round residents," Norman said. "Chateaugay Lake swells by 600 people in the summer and videos are a big part of relaxing. Our customers have said it's good to have a new business in downtown."

SBDC business adviser Karen Stehlin submitted the couple's success story for the annual report. Only eight businesses in the state are featured each year.

When she found out they were being considered for the award, she was amazed but told them "not to get their hopes up."

The award's intent is to recognize the New York business that has managed to

surmount obstacles and make a business happen. Part of what made Video Storm so attractive for the SBDC award is that Norman handles all of the bookkeeping on a computer with a special program for the blind. JAWS, with a video scan feature, talks to Norman, allowing him to hear what he is doing on the computer. If necessary, it can also provide Braille output.

Norman traveled to Albany in August 2004 to set up and learn the features he would need to survive in a business. Oddly enough, the older Quicken 2001 set-up became the one that worked the best with JAWS. He then wrote all the programs they would need to run the business.

"When you are blind, graphics aren't important," he said with a matter-of-fact tone. "The fewer graphics, which is what Quicken 2001 has, the easier for the computer program to handle the project because JAWS doesn't read graphics."

"So much business is done today through the computer," Rachel said. "It was imperative that we have something that adapted to our needs."

The couple said they are happy and content, having set up their business in a century-old building at the only busy intersection in Chateaugay.

"It was a real surprise and a real lift when we found out we had won," Norman said. "It was worth everything to be honored."