

ARIZONA BUSINESS THE BUSINESS RESOURCE GAZETTE

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INSIDE

Whoa: What's that in your recycling bin?

Phoenix has begun a pilot program to recycle yard clippings and horse manure from select residents, to reduce waste in landfills. Officials want to see 3,000 curbside green-organics bins in use by December and to expand the effort eventually.

Tan bins hold organics in Phoenix. ROB SCHUMACHER/ABG

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Scottsdale commercial real-estate pro Don Schaefer (left) was joined by his son Eric in 2002. He taught him the business from the ground up, literally: He had Eric dig signpost-holes. MICHAEL SCHENNUM/ABG

Father-and-son synergy

By Georgann Yara

Special for the ABG | azcentral.com

Anyone who thought Eric Schaefer waltzed into a cushy office position at his father's commercial real-estate brokerage and management firm after quitting his technology job was mistaken.

Spending all day in Schaefer and Associates' air-conditioned Scottsdale suite was not the plan that Don Schaefer, founder and principal of the company, had for his son.

When he told Eric he needed to learn the business from the ground up, he meant it literally.

"He basically handed me a shovel and sent me up with a bunch of (real-estate) signs," said Eric Schaefer, who is co-principal of the company. "I spent that first summer digging holes for signs."

Don Schaefer started his company alone in 1983, moving to Arizona after a long career as a certified public accountant and in the real-estate market in the Midwest.

"I did not take the easiest route, and I decided to let him know what my thinking was and what my strategy was," the elder Schaefer said. "I tried to give him a more complete education into the business, so we started from scratch."

After a brief pause, he added, "Eric might be exaggerating. There might have been one sign

Immediately, his son chimed in, "Oh, there was more

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Tucson activist pushes labeling for GMO foods

By Howard Fischer

Capitol Media Services

Saying people are entitled to know what they're eating, a Tucson activist has taken the first steps to force a public vote next year to require labeling of foods with genetically modified ingredients.

Jonathan McLane said he has concerns about whether plants with genes that have been modified, perhaps to create their own pesticides, are safe to consume. He said there hasn't been enough research to determine long-term effects.

But McLane said that's not the main issue; nothing in his measure would ban the sale of such foods.

Instead, it would simply require the labels that show re- dients to include a statement that the product contains genetically modified organisms. At that point, he said, shoppers could make their own decisions.

"People have a right to know exactly what's in their food," he said.

McLane has until July 3, 2014, to gather 172,809 valid signatures to force the issue onto the ballot.

The campaign is going to get

a fight from the agriculture community, just as it did last year in California, when a similar measure was beaten back by voters on a 53 percent-47 percent margin.

Julie Murphree, spokeswoman for the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation, said the reason for the opposition is not that her organization is against consumers being informed.

She said products that are certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as organic already are labeled as not including genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, as they have been called. And other manufacturers already are free to put "GMO-free" labels on their products.

It's the connotations of labeling that matter, she said.

"Mandatory GMO food labeling implies risk where there really is none," she said.

"If you label that non-GMO, it's 'Oh, GMO foods must be unhealthy and evil,'" Murphree said. And they're not."

That's also the position of agribusiness giant Monsanto, which produces and sells many of the genetically modified

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than one sign.”

Since the two teamed up in 2002, Schaefer and Associates has nearly doubled its staff, averaged a gain of three properties to its management portfolio each year and fortified its services. The Schaefers also regularly work with contractors and other entities, which makes the company something of a one-stop-shop in the industry.

“The core has always been property management, but it has gone through different models over years depending on the economy or other conditions,” Don Schaefer said.

Eric Schaefer joined his father after leaving a lucrative post-college career in San Francisco, where he rode the wave of the tech boom and found success in the advertising and marketing areas of the field. Finally, burned out and tired of the stress and working for people he didn't like or respect, Eric quit his job and called Dad.

“His words were, ‘What took you so long?’ ” he recalled about his father's response.

The two never talked about working together, and it never crossed either of their minds until that moment, when Don Schaefer suggested the booming Arizona real-estate market might offer a good career for his son.

Of course, that change began with shoveling dirt under the desert sun. Looking back on those months, however, Eric Schaefer appreciates the grueling days.

“I took a 90 percent pay cut ... I went from the glamorous world of technology to the gritty world of commercial real estate,” he said. “But that first summer tells the story of who we are as a company. That degree of being hands-on, paying attention to details, that's where my start began.”

The importance of timing also became a valuable lesson for the younger Schaefer, who entered the business during a time of optimism only to have things turn upside down a few years later.

“The recession was a great lesson for me, he said. “Leasing or selling wasn't easy. In hindsight, it taught me that it takes hard work to be successful.”

His father said that simple,



Don (left) and Eric Schaefer say working together works well for them. MICHAEL SCHENNUM/ABG

easy business principles have been responsible for much of the company's success. Fostering good relationships with clients, whether they are landlords, property owners or tenants, goes a long way toward everyone getting what they want, he said.

And, the Schaefers never un-

derestimate the power of returning a phone call.

“We'll get calls and the prospect will say, ‘Oh my gosh, you actually called us back,’” Don Schaefer said. “Many companies don't return calls promptly. I prefer to deal with something now rather than later.”

That kind of responsiveness,

his son said, is the essence of the company.

“We've gotten deals done not because our space is bigger, but because we returned the call,” he said. “When a client calls, they are going to get someone with the last name ‘Schaefer’ on the phone. That goes a long way.”

SCHAEFER & ASSOCIATES

Where: 7621 E. Gray Road, Suite D, Scottsdale.

Employees: Five.

Details: 480-998-5025, screaz.com

Nancy Cook owns several Arizona properties and has been working with the Schaefers for more than 15 years. A resident of Missoula, Mont., Cook appreciates their communication, dedication, honesty and ability to keep her tenants happy and properties well-maintained.

“As a property owner who lives a long way from our real estate, it is crucial to be represented by people I can trust,” Cook said. “I rarely use the word ‘trust’ in business relationships, but I trust Don and Eric with our real-estate assets.”

Cook credited the pair with keeping her from being vulnerable to market forces.

“They are proactive. They help me plan for the future with our properties, and they have outstanding rapport with our tenants,” she said. “Unlike many in their profession, they have the long view in mind.”

The partnership has been professionally and personally beneficial for the father and son who never envisioned it. Eric Schaefer called Don his best friend in and out of the office. The occasional work disagreement is forgotten as soon as they head home.

“I can't recommend it for everybody, but it works out great for us,” Eric Schaefer said. “I found this business to be far more rewarding than I thought it would be. I'm grateful to have a great mentor.”

But the perks go both ways. Even with his decades of experience, Don Schaefer admitted learning a thing or two from his son.

“I think at a certain point in your career, you begin to take it for granted and lose the edge,” he said. “When Eric joined me, all of a sudden I had a renewed enthusiasm for my career and saw the opportunity to pass the torch to my son.

“The ultimate reward is to see that continue and see him do it so well.”