

Business news

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Business

The Hour

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PAGE C 1

IN BRIEF**Norwalk company****honored by magazine**

NORWALK — Rabbit Ears Entertainment, a division of South Norwalk-based Palace Production Center, has received a judge's special award for its storytelling series of videos and audiobooks by The Children's Music Web, an online non-profit resource for children, teachers and children's musicians worldwide.

The Children's Music Web Awards competition is guided by adults and chosen by kids, according to the organization's Web site, www.childrensmusic.org.

Award categories cover music, storytelling, individual songs, DVD/video, best new artist, and "by kids for kids." First family judges screen the candidates and make preliminary decisions. Then classrooms and day care centers worldwide pick their favorites.

This year, Random House's Listening Library is re-releasing all of the Rabbit Ears titles in audiobook formats. In 2007, Rabbit Ears plans to release two new titles: "Tom Thumb," narrated by John Cleese with original music by Elvis Costello, and "Happy Trails," narrated by Roy Rogers.

Tauck honored**in several categories**

NORWALK — Travel Weekly, a national newspaper of the travel industry, honored Norwalk-based Tauck World Discovery during its fourth annual Readers Choice Awards dinner and ceremony at The Pierre Hotel in Manhattan recently.

Tauck received awards for "Best Tour Operator — Europe," and "Best Tour Operator — Canada." The awards recognize Tauck's excellence in its two largest and most important markets. Tauck operates 39 different upscale, in-depth, escorted itineraries in Europe, and 32 in North America.

Southport gunmaker**offering buyouts**

NEWPORT — Firearms maker Sturm, Ruger & Co. is offering voluntary buyout packages to senior employees, changing its pay structure and selling off some property in New Hampshire to help cut costs. The company announced it hopes to cut its payroll by \$3 million in 2007 with buyout offers to 150 employees.

Sturm, Ruger is based in Southport, with facilities in Newport and Prescott, Ariz. Sullivan said the company, and the entire firearms industry, has seen a drop in sales.

Sturm, Ruger recently has made gains in its market share, Sullivan said, but production still is about half what it was during the company's peak in the early 1990s, when the Newport plant alone made some 800,000 guns a year.

Norwalk Chamber**sets Jan. events**

NORWALK — The Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce will hold its 2007 Economic Outlook Luncheon from 11:45 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 10, at DoubleTree Hotel. Cost is \$40 for members and \$60 for nonmembers. Tables of 10 are \$400.

Joel Naroff, Ph.D., chief economist of Commerce Bank, and Fred Carstensen, professor in the department of economics at University of Connecticut, will be the featured speakers.

The Chamber will also hold a Networking Breakfast from 7:45 to 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 17, at AlphaGraphics at 15 Oakwood Ave. Cost is \$5 at the door and \$15 for nonmembers.

Express Scripts makes \$26B bid for Caremark

By LUCAS L. JOHNSON II
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Pharmacy-benefit manager Express Scripts launched a hostile \$26 billion bid Monday to acquire its larger competitor Caremark Rx, potentially scuttling a competing offer from the CVS drug store chain. The deal, if approved, may help cut drug prices for consumers.

The race to consolidate in the drug industry comes as the pressure to lower prices is growing. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. recently announced it would sell some generic drugs for \$4, and rival retailer Target Corp. has a similar program. That leaves companies like Express

Scripts and Caremark Rx, who act as middlemen between drug companies and employees, to struggle to reduce costs.

Express Scripts Inc. proposed to pay \$29.25 in cash and 0.426 shares of its stock for each share of Caremark stock. The company said that equals \$58.50 per Caremark share, based on Express Scripts' Friday's closing price.

Shares of Caremark rose \$5.88, or 11.7 percent, to \$56.18 on the New York Stock Exchange, and Express Scripts shares rose 69 cents to \$69.35 on the Nasdaq Stock Market.

CVS Corp., the nation's largest operator of drugstores and second to Walgreen Co. in sales, said on Nov. 1 that it

planned to acquire Caremark Rx Inc. for about \$21.2 billion in stock. It said that the deal would save \$400 million annually.

Express Scripts said its proposed combination with Caremark would save \$500 million a year.

Express Scripts officials didn't specify where the additional \$100 million in savings would come from, but they expressed confidence in finding it.

"We believe we have the power and the roadmap to find it," said George Paz, president, CEO and chairman of Express Scripts. "We believe the offer we put on the table is truly a superior deal and we feel it is going to stand on its own two feet."

Nashville, Tenn.-based Caremark said in a statement on Monday that it continues to be bound to the merger agreement with CVS Corp. and that "the parties anticipate filing a joint proxy statement with the Securities & Exchange Commission shortly."

Woonsocket, R.I. based CVS issued a statement saying the company hasn't had an opportunity to review the Express Scripts offer but added that it has a "definitive" agreement with Caremark.

"We believe the prospects for completing that transaction are excellent and we remain confident in the long-

See EXPRESS, C2



Owner Steve VanWilliams is flanked by employees Rafael Rosado, left, and Andre Woodberry at Superior Martial Art Weapons and Supplies at 174 Main St. VanWilliams took over the store from Pak Chan, who owned it for 27 years.

Hour photo/ERIK TRAUTMANN

Changing of the guard

Superior Martial Art Weapons & Supplies is under new ownership after 27 years with the original owner

By CHRIS BOSAK
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Steve VanWilliams is picking up where Pak Chan left off.

Chan owned and operated Superior Martial Art Weapons & Supplies at 174 Main St. for 27 years before closing the shop to "enjoy life a little bit." It wasn't closed for long before VanWilliams — a former customer of Chan's — reopened the shop at the same location and under the same name.

"I've known Steve since he

was 14 years old," Chan said. "He's been coming to me to shop and he didn't want the store to close. He's doing a good job."

"I just got a little burned out," Chan added. "I've been working six days a week for so long and I had been running the store mostly by myself."

VanWilliams holds black belts in several martial arts disciplines, including Tae Kwan Do and Tai-chi and has been a martial arts instructor and personal trainer for more than 20 years. He has also performed for the United States in the Goodwill Games and is a 10-time Connecticut State Champion in full contact karate.

Superior is his first retail venture.

"This is an icon place," VanWilliams said. "It's the only martial arts retail store

around. (Chan) was going to retire and close it up. It's a little overwhelming at times, but so far it's been an easy transition. I've always been on the other side of the counter."

Superior sells a wide variety of martial arts movies, equipment and weapons, such as swords, stars and nunchucks. It is also an official distributor of Asian World of Martial Arts.

"We sell everything they have," VanWilliams said. "We're a direct distributor for them in Connecticut."

"We've upscaled the store a lot," he added. "There's more of a selection. We have anything to do with martial arts."

VanWilliams expanded the store's selections to include tea sets, incense, jewelry boxes, masks and other gifts. Superior will also offer

embroidering and silk screening.

Superior will also sponsor athletes in mixed martial arts and ultimate fighting. VanWilliams is also helping to promote the league International Fight League (IFL) and is promoting a Dec. 29 IFL event at Mohegan Sun.

VanWilliams has three employees at Superior, all of whom are experienced at martial arts: André Woodberry, general manager; Rafael Rosado, store manager; and Dave Fleming.

VanWilliams is also an exercise physiologist and nutritionist. His wife owns Academy Pilates in Westport.

To reach Superior Martial Art Weapons & Supplies, call (203) 847-3989

On the Web:

www.smaws.com

Viral marketing: It's all word of mouse

Did you know ...

- One billion people or one-sixth of the world population are online each day
- Each person is exposed to more than 3,000 ads per day.
- Only 18 percent of television ads generate a positive return on investment, ROI.
- Only 14 percent of the population trust advertising.
- 90 percent of people skip ads altogether.
- 56 percent will not buy from companies that advertise excessively.

Keeping those statistics in mind, it is only natural and wise to venture into creative avenues on the Web to produce brand identity and consumer loyalty. The Internet marketing profitability is statistically growing in leaps and bounds. The Internet has not only revolutionized the way we communicate. It has revolutionized the way we conduct business while it transcends all aspects of our lives.

When a business captures an Internet



ANDREW
DiFiore

audience, the success online can be measured, monitored and will be reflected in your bottom line. The growth can be staggering when masterfully administered.

Although the concept of viral marketing has been around for several years, when most people hear about it, it often has mixed connotations and is too often misunderstood. Actually and quite simply put it is "word of mouth" marketing. Getting people to talk about your Web site seems simple enough but making

you stand out from the millions of other Web sites and creating a curiosity about the message you want to deliver can be daunting.

Perfect examples of viral marketing campaigns include Hotmail, Unilever and Virgin.net. Each of these promotions utilized the pass along theory to actively engage the initial users until their audience became exponentially enormous.

Hotmail most definitely put viral marketing on the map. With a budget of \$5 million, Hotmail signed up more than 12 million subscribers in a mere 18 months simply by giving away free e-mail addresses.

Unilever used a similar strategy offering free samples of Dove soap for you and your friends. They not only built an incredible database of e-mail addresses for their organization, but they also were able to sample their product and boost their market share by 10 percent.

See VIRAL, C2



Contributed image

A fun Web site helps increase consumer interest in Weston-based Stacey Lu Confectioners. The site was redesigned and rebranded by Stamford-based answerYES Interactive.