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CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

R.I. businesses offered disaster help

BY NANCY LAVIN | Lavin@PBN.com

MARK S. HAYWARD was in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 11, 2001.

With the metro shut down following the devastating terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, Hayward walked from the U.S. Small Business Administration headquarters to his hotel through empty streets and past shuttered storefronts.

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything Hayward has seen in his lifetime, including more than two decades as director of the SBA Rhode Island district office, that "eerie and unusual feeling" in the aftermath of Sept. 11 rings true today.

The long-term economic impact of the 2001

terrorist attacks, which hit Rhode Island's hospitality industry particularly hard, also bears some resemblance to what many predict will be a monthslong economic slowdown caused by efforts to mitigate the spread of the new coronavirus.

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HOT TOPIC

Scrambling to install virtual workplaces

BY NANCY LAVIN | Lavin@PBN.com

AS COMPANIES ACROSS THE STATE transition to remote work, information-technology service firms have been getting slammed with requests to set up the software, security and other technology required for employees to work from home.

"A lot of our clients have disaster recovery plans, but not too many had a plan in place for something like this that would last multiple weeks," said Nick Bernfeld, co-CEO of IT Support RI. "It's a lot different than what people were planning for."

Escalating concerns over the coronavirus directly corresponded to an increase in calls to the North Smithfield company from clients seeking to enhance or begin services that will allow virtual work, Bernfeld said.

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Makings of a 'SUPER SECTOR'



Experts say R.I.'s \$5B blue economy has oceans of potential

BY ELIZABETH GRAHAM | Graham@PBN.com

INTERTWINED with Rhode Island's economy as a source of food, recreation and power, and as a medium for transportation and defense, the ocean has sustained a considerable amount of industry in the state for centuries.

SEE BLUE ECONOMY PAGE 12



PBN PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS

SUMMIT HEALTH CARE

SPRING 2020

FREE VIRTUAL SUMMIT ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Wednesday, April 1, 2020 | 9:00 - 11:00am

See page 13 for details.

HOT TOPIC

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Requests include tech-based services such as voice-over-internet-protocol phone systems, or VoIP, and software packages, as well as security measures such as secure email encryption connections between homes and offices, multifactor authentication and virtual private networks.

Anti-virus protection has also become a bigger concern, as the push for remote work has brought a new onslaught of phishing scams and ransomware from “bad actors” trying to take advantage of system vulnerabilities, said Jason Albuquerque, chief information and security officer for Exeter-based **Carousel Industries of North America Inc.**

Like Bernfeld, Albuquerque reported a significant increase in demand from existing customers, which he attributed in part to the expansion of free licensing offered through company partners such as Zoom, Microsoft and Cisco.

Christine Cunneen, CEO and co-founder of **Hire Image LLC**, was among IT Support RI’s existing clients who opted to beef up services. The Johnston-based background screening company already had some security measures in place but needed security



INCREASED DEMAND: Tony Folco is a sales manager at information-technology service company IT Support RI, which is now handling increased demand from clients who are taking their businesses remote.
PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

software for new laptops purchased for lower-level staff, Cunneen said. She wasn’t worried about the technology requirements for virtual work so much as employee productivity and lack of new business.

As an international company already set up for 100% remote work,

Carousel is marketing both its tech support and general advice for best practices, Albuquerque said.

“[Remote work] doesn’t have to hurt productivity,” Albuquerque said. “Our role is, how can we educate customers to mimic what we have been doing already.”

The rush by companies to allow for work at home is causing some problems.

While major software companies such as Zoom and Microsoft should be prepared to take on the onslaught of new customers, certain hardware is quickly becoming increasingly hard to come by.

Brad Mirza, executive vice president and partner for **Secured Network Services Inc.**, an IT service firm with offices in Providence, said the laptops the company resells from major manufacturers are selling at lightning speed. In the interest of observing social distancing and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention protocols, the company is working to automate its setup process for laptops rather than having technicians offer in-person services, he said.

And though the recent demand for remote, work-friendly technology has created some short-term chaos for companies, the investment will continue even after the COVID-19 pandemic calms down, Mirza said.

“As this goes on, businesses are going to make new investments in technology solutions that will make it a lot easier for people to be mobile,” he said. ■

‘Not too many had a plan in place for something like this.’

NICK BERNFELD, IT Support RI co-CEO

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