

## DAILY NEWS

### The Bronx is earning! Borough leads city in startup growth

Small business owners see potential in the Bronx where costs are relatively low and market is still untapped

BY [PHYLLIS FURMAN](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS



RICHARD HARBUS/FOR NY DAILY NEWS

Golf pro turned-entrepreneur-Anthony Esposito won the concession to run Turtle Cove Golf Center in the Bronx and has poured more than half a million dollars into a major revamp.

The sun's out and golfers are practicing their swing along the freshly paved tee line at Turtle Cove Golf Center at Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx.

Nearby, workers are about to put the finishing touches on a refurbished batting cage area featuring 12 new, state-of-the-art pitching machines.

Two years ago, golf pro-turned-entrepreneur Anthony Esposito, 39, won a concession from the city's parks department to run the 25-acre golf practice center.

Since then, Esposito's startup company, National Golf Group, has poured more than one-half million dollars into renovating Turtle Cove, which had fallen on tough times under a previous operator.

His goal: to turn Turtle Cove into a family-friendly hub that draws visitors from the Bronx and beyond.

"I felt like we could do great things here," Esposito said.

Across the Bronx, thousands of newly-minted small business owners are thinking the same.

The Bronx has become startup central with the number of newly incorporated companies growing fourfold from 1991 to 2011, when 4,690 new businesses were launched there, according to a report from the Center for an Urban Future. Its growth rate has outpaced all other boroughs.

Strivers investing in the Bronx see a chance to capitalize on a still-untapped market, where the cost to start an enterprise remains relatively low.

"Rents are more affordable in comparison with Manhattan and Brooklyn," said Akbar Rizvi, chief lending officer at Spring Bank in the Bronx.

Major redevelopment projects, starting with the new Yankee Stadium, have boosted confidence. Bronx Chamber of Commerce president Lenny Caro noted the new Mall at Bay Plaza, under construction, and the first Marriott coming to the borough.

"For a long time, the Bronx was overlooked by big national chains and small entrepreneurs alike," said Jonathan Bowles, executive director of the Center for an Urban Future.

"Now, a lot of business owners see potential."

The borough's woes are also fostering entrepreneurship. With its unemployment rate at 12.5% - the highest in the city - local residents are seeking other sources of income.

"People who have skills and interests are forced to act upon them because they lost their jobs," said Jennifer DaSilva, executive director of Start

Small, Think Big, a Bronx-based non-profit that helps business owners.

Immigrants make up one-third of the borough's population and many come here with an entrepreneurial spirit, said Clarence Stanley, director of the Bronx Small Business Development Center at Lehman College.

"They come from cultures where it's not unusual for someone to own their own business," Stanley said.

"They establish their own communities and network among themselves."

Born in the Dominican Republic, 31-year-old Winston Martinez is following in the footsteps of his father, who owned a convenience store in the South Bronx.

But Martinez is taking a different route. Two years ago, he decided to supplement his income by opening a wholesale car dealership, Integrity Car Export, out of his home in the South Bronx. He learned about the automotive business from his uncle, also a car dealer in the Bronx.

Last year, Martinez, who purchases used cars at auctions, sold 75 cars, taking in \$340,000 in revenues and turning a small profit. With the help of the NYC Business Solutions Center in the Bronx, he was able to secure lines of credit to help ramp up his business.

As an immigrant, "once you come here, the whole objective is to better yourself," Martinez said.

Rod Rodriguez, 63, took advantage of depressed real estate values when he decided to open a restaurant on City Island seven years ago.

With the help of an SBA loan, Rodriguez was able to purchase a property and launch Ohana, the borough's only Japanese hibachi restaurant. He credits the city for cleaning up the Bronx and improving security.

"I knew that the Bronx was up and coming," Rodriguez said. "I took my gamble and it paid off."

Suzann Fleming, 38, and her husband Bill Fleming, 39, both graduates of Fordham University, saw a void in the neighborhood surrounding their alma mater.

There were no gourmet coffee shops for students, professors and others living and working in the area.

In 2010, they opened The Blend Cafe on E. Fordham Rd., one block from the Fordham campus. It has since become a student destination.

For now, upscale shops have yet to join The Blend on E. Fordham Rd. which is

still filled with gas stations, fast food outlets and mom-and-pops.

But with a neighborhood rezoning effort underway and redevelopment projects taking place nearby, Suzann Fleming expects that to change.

"We know it's only a matter of time until others see what we see."

\*\*\*

*Want to start or grow your business in the Bronx?*

*Here are some resources that can help:*

**New York City Business Solutions Center, Bronx Center**

Free services offered by the Department of Small Business Services to help businesses start, operate, and expand. [NYC.gov/sbs](http://NYC.gov/sbs)

**Start Small, Think Big**

Pro bono legal and financial advice  
[StartSmallThinkBig.org](http://StartSmallThinkBig.org)

**Sunshine Bronx Business Incubator**

New York City-sponsored business incubator. Provides business resources and affordable space to help startups grow.

[bronx.sunshineny.com](http://bronx.sunshineny.com)

**Bronx Small Business Development Center at Lehman College**

Advises small business owners on financing, business plans and other issues  
[nyssbdc.org](http://nyssbdc.org)

**Fordham Foundry**

Business incubator; Education, research and outreach programs related to entrepreneurship.  
[fordhamfoundry.org](http://fordhamfoundry.org)

**South Bronx Economic Development Corp. (Sobro)**

Provides services to Bronx residents and focuses on rebuilding borough's infrastructure  
[sobro.org](http://sobro.org)

**Bronx Chamber of Commerce**

[BronxChamber.org](http://BronxChamber.org)

**Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp.**

Helps foster childcare and food businesses  
[whedco.org](http://whedco.org)