



HARLEMLANES

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Growth tales: Key strategies used by young firms

Harlem Bowling Alley Branches Out

By Lisa Goff

Sharon Joseph and Gail Richards saw a market for a bowling alley in gentrifying Harlem. But by the time they cut the ribbon on Harlem Lanes on April 1, the bowling alley had been joined by a sports bar, cafe, lounge, party rooms and an additional set of bowling alleys on the second floor.

Faced with the classic startup question of which niche to fill, the partners opted to open what amounts to several startups on two floors under one roof. The 125,000-square-foot facility is located at West 126th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard.

"This is a much larger scale than we imagined to begin with," says Ms. Joseph, a former management consultant with Booz Allen Hamilton.

Such a multipronged debut is hard to pull off for a startup, but Harlem Lanes enjoys two unique advantages. It has the backing of deep-pocketed investors such as real estate brokerage Newmark, which alone has put up more than \$1 million. And, as a participant in the William J. Clinton Foundation Urban Enterprise Initiative, Harlem Lanes will have access to free consulting advice for at least the next year.

Ms. Joseph says she was emboldened as well by the location of the business, which is convenient to multiple public transportation hubs. Harlem Lanes also is blessed with a famous upstairs neighbor--the Alhambra Ballroom, which occupies the top two stories of the building. With the planned opening of a seafood restaurant on the ground floor, Ms. Joseph says, the building has the chance to become an entertainment destination.

Ms. Joseph and her aunt, Ms. Richards, split the alley's 24 lanes between two target markets: families on the ground floor and singles upstairs. The cafe, party rooms and sports bar are designed to appeal to bowlers and nonbowlers alike.

So far, the partners are knocking down all the pins. The event rooms are booked through July with children's birthday parties, bachelorette parties, corporate team-building exercises, a 50th birthday party, even a fashion show. Harlem Lanes has 30 employees and anticipates first-year revenues of between \$3 million and \$4 million.

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