



"Previously, through an executive order, Governor Pataki exempted Internet businesses from charging sales tax to its customers," Robert S. Kinnin, NetStep cofounder said. "Sales tax credits add another advantage and will help us save money. We buy equipment that is worth thousands to tens of thousands of dollars and not having to pay the seven 3/4 percent sales taxes will be a great help."

NetStep, which has four full-time and two part-time employees, provides Internet service to large and small businesses and home users. In addition, it provides web site hosting locally, regionally and nationally. It started its business in uptown Kingston and moved downtown in the summer of 1996. "We needed space, it had better parking and the telephone company facilities were more plentiful," Kinnin said of the move. "Uptown business, the county building and I would be clamoring for the same copper wire. By moving downtown, we are able to expand in terms of telephone company facilities and office space."

Kinnin was originally in Rhinebeck and moved to Kingston because it made economic sense in terms of reduced telephone costs. "We would have to use two telephone services in Rhinebeck, one for Rhinebeck itself and one for the rest of the area. In Kingston, we only have to buy from one company."

Being a local Internet service provider has its advantages. "From a parochial sense, people like to keep their money local," Kinnin said. "We have a face, and people can touch us. We are also open to do new things, and listen to what customers need."

For more details on the Empire Zone program or to set up a meeting, please call Catherine A. Maloney in the Zone Office at (845) 334-3962.

"We like Robb Kinnin," Michael Mosher said. Mosher is the vice president of retail energy services for Central Hudson Energy Services, a subsidiary of CH Energy Group. "We've been with NetStep for two years," Mosher said. "Robb is responsible, knowledgeable and provides good service."

Concert promoter Harris Goldberg of Concert Ideas in Woodstock is also a loyal customer. "They're responsible, they keep me informed when there are problems," Goldberg said. "It's very important that you can deal with people that you can trust."

NetStep also provides web service nationally to most states. "Harris, for example, hired a new employee in Ohio and was happy that he could use NetStep," Kinnin said. "That saved Harris money and time. He didn't have to connect to two providers."

Kinnin, always looking ahead, predicted the need to connect nationally. "People were telecommuting from New York City," he said. "Weekenders would come up for the summer, sign up for the service, then they would close the service down in fall. We decided to expand beyond the region to keep these customers. The same holds true for snow bunnies who spend the winter in Florida."

While Kinnin's team does their own marketing, Kingston's push in economic development helps financial growth, Kinnin said. "We would all benefit from Hudson Valley DataNet," Kinnin said referring to Kingston's support for the company that will provide high-speed data access for the area. "Not only would the service be faster, but it would be at a lower cost than Verizon." The prospective construction of the Noah Hotel on the Rondout waterfront would also be another economic boom for NetStep, particularly if the hotel has high-speed Internet capability. "It would be tremendous to hook up the hotel," Kinnin said. "Businesses would meet at the Noah if they could connect to the Internet."

NetStep makes sure it's ahead of the technology curve to maintain its clients and grow its business. Location in the Empire Zone helps. "Our margins are extremely tight and to keep pace, we are buying equipment every two years," Kinnin said. "The sales tax credits and the wage tax credits allow us to keep an edge up financially."

Monkey Joe Roasting Company

That's buzz at its best, with coffee to suit every taste. Monkey Joe roasts primarily single origin speciality beans. Climates, soil and how the bean is processed in the country of origin, determine flavor. Green beans in burlap bags line the wainscoting at Monkey Joe. Walk the circumference of the room and take a trip through the world from Costa Rica to Brazil to India, with all roads leading to the café's 30-lb capacity roaster. The tall, red colored machine sits in the middle of the shop, catty-cornered, and takes up 1/3 of the floor space. Hunter green table tops fill in the rest of the space and complement the warmth of Monkey Joe's chocolate and deep green decor. The roaster as centerpiece suits Cicale's philosophy. "It authenticates what we do," Cicale said. "The purpose is to put people in touch with this process directly. They see you roast the beans and then they drink the coffee."

The dining experience makes a full circle, with music providing style. Cicale plays big band and jazz music from the thirties and forties. The sounds set a period mood that suits the decor that includes the building's original hanging lamps and the brown, white and maroon floor tiles. The motivation is to linger and drink espresso.

That's the point. "We felt Kingston was our home. We lived in the city for years, until 1988 and moved to Ulster Park to get more space. My wife is from Port Ewen. I'm from Highland. Kingston is our community."

And midtown is the place. "I really have a lot of belief that it is going to be a thriving, positive place to be in the next few years," Cicale said. "I see a lot of signs that point in that direction - the renovation of City Hall which is almost next door, and Eckerd Drug which moved in across the street."

City Hall, a few blocks away, recently reopened after a \$6.9 million restoration. Eckerd Drug replaced an unused building. Scott Dutton Associates, an architectural firm formerly located in uptown Kingston, just moved to midtown in a building it renovated. Barcone's Music, a longtime Kingston business, expanded its operation in midtown.

"I did some studies when I was making the decision to open a coffee bar and café, and rated each site I looked at," Cicale said. "This location rated very well. Coffee business depends on return customers and works well in a business area where people come in, to and from work."

As if on cue, John Many who owns Abeel Auto Sales in the Town of Ulster walked in. "Best coffee anywhere," Many said during a late afternoon stop at Monkey Joe. "I come twice a day. I would rather not have any, than go for another brand. There is absolutely no comparison."

Judging from Cicale, Many is not alone. "I lease the building and people ask me why I invested money in a rental," Cicale said. "My answer is, if this business succeeds the way I want it to, the money I put into it will be a sound investment."

Product and location are perfect fits for Cicale. Not only does he draw customers from midtown's two hospitals, Eckerd Drug, Kingston High School, various medical buildings, and New York State's Department of Environmental Protection, he also draws from the neighborhood. Mac and Sandy MacCreery walk over from their home nearby, two or three times a week. Mac MacCreery likes the music. This day, that means Charlie Barnett on saxophone. Coffee counts as well. "It's a break in the afternoon and I like my coffee," Mac MacCreery said. "I used to buy comic books here in the forties when it was a drug store."

Like the drug store, Monkey Joe has a counter, although you can't sit at it. But you can take in the café's collection of monkeys which are perched everywhere or watch how the staff brew espresso or whips up a speciality drink like Chocolate Monkey - coffee, chocolate and bananas. "You can be creative in your own venture," Kathy Nealis said. Nealis was formerly a nurse manager of a surgical floor.

The Empire Zone can help with that creativity through its tax credit program that helps save money while the business grows. "Being a Certified Business in the Zone gives us definite advantages," Cicale said. "The New York State program, which Kingston administers, makes a difference in our success."