

BUSINESS

connections

It's Fun to Gather at Red Dog Bar & Bistro



Brand Advocates are Your Raving Fans **3**

Business Spotlight on Red Dog Bar & Bistro **4**

Grow with the Times **6** // Businesses Improve Efficiency with VoIP **7**



Management

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

Business Sales Department Contact Information

1-844-SKYBEST
businessolutions@skyline.org

Robin Miller

Inside Sales Coordinator
Ashe, Alleghany & Avery
Counties; Mountain City, TN
robin.miller@skyline.org

Hollie Brown

Inside Sales Coordinator
Lenoir, NC & Watauga County
hollie.brown@skyline.org

Corporate Office

1200 NC Hwy 194 N,
West Jefferson, NC 28694

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, electronic, photocopying, recording, mechanical or otherwise without the prior written permission of SkyLine/SkyBest. All rights are reserved. Copyright ©2023 by SkyLine Membership Corp. and SkyBest Communications, Inc. and Cornerstone Publishing Group, Inc.

Trademarks

All brand names and product names used in this publication are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.

Additional Issues

Extra issues are available to business customers on a limited basis while supplies last. Contact Robin Miller at 1-844-SKYBEST.

Postmaster Send Changes To

Allyson Hart
Marketing Specialist
SkyLine/SkyBest
PO Box 759
West Jefferson, NC 28694

BUSINESS connections

Let's get growing in 2024. The start of a new year tends to give all of us an extra push to move forward with new motivation and inspiration. What type of growth is your business aiming toward this year? Growth in efficiency? Growth in customers? Growth in sales?

This Winter issue of *Business Connections* explores the topic of growth from several angles. We begin on page 3 with **Brand Advocates are Your Raving Fans**, which is a reminder that your most enthusiastic customers will spread the word about your business and help it grow.

Don't miss the **Business Spotlight on Red Dog Bar & Bistro** on pages 4 and 5. Its Piney Creek location is wildly popular, leading to the December 2023 opening of a second location in West Jefferson. According to co-owner Julie Milunic, this growth is the result of excellent food and an excellent staff. SkyLine/SkyBest supports the business with broadband internet and Hosted VoIP phone services (and visits for dinner).

On page 6, you're encouraged to **Grow With the Times to Grow Your Business**. If you hold on too tightly to traditions from the past—doing things simply because that's the way you've always done them—it can hurt your business in the present. For example, if your phone system is a relic from the past, consider this: **Businesses Improve Efficiency with VoIP**, as you'll learn on page 7. SkyBest Hosted Voice uses VoIP technology and can help your business achieve growth in efficiency as well as flexibility.

No matter what growth goals you have for 2024, the entire SkyLine/SkyBest team is cheering you on and wants to see you succeed. Contact us to discuss how our communications services can enhance your work.



Sincerely,

Kim Shepherd
Chief Executive Officer

ON THE COVER:
Left to right: SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive Zara Worely, SkyLine/SkyBest Inside Sales Coordinator Robin Miller, Red Dog co-owners Matt and Julie Milunic, Red Dog Executive Chef Keith Jones, Red Dog co-owner Gayle Winston, SkyLine/SkyBest Field Services Supervisor Tim Watson, and SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive Haleigh Seamon

Photo credit for local images: Todd Bush



Brand Advocates are Your Raving Fans

Your business can win big by encouraging these customers

Customers who buy your products are great, and those who tell a few others about you are even better. But the most valuable type of customers are your raving fans, otherwise known as brand advocates.

These customers can have a huge impact on your business since they love it so much they regularly want to sing its praises. Brand advocates will tell glowing stories about your products and services during conversations with friends, family and co-workers. They will also post enthusiastic recommendations online via social media.

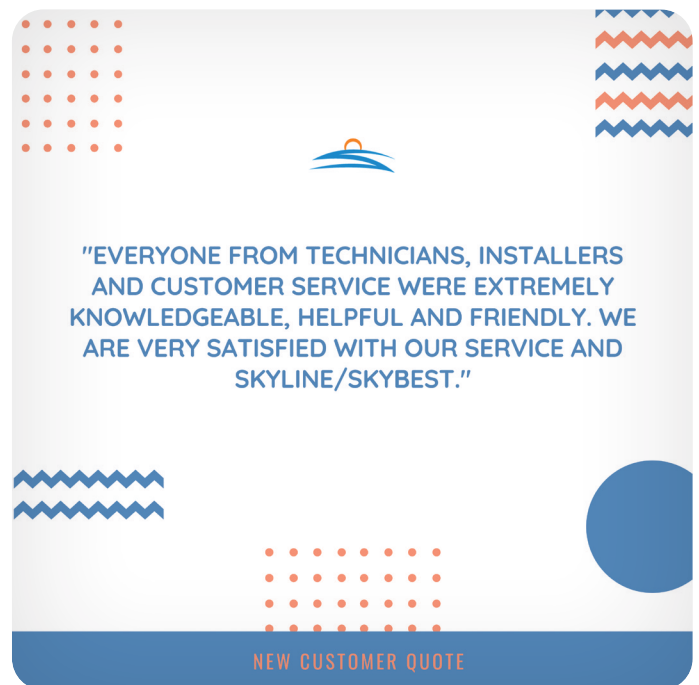
Since potential customers tend to believe messages that come from other customers more than messages directly from companies themselves, brand advocates are a valuable tool for bringing in new business. While some people will naturally be more excited about your offerings than others, you can take steps to help encourage and develop brand advocates. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Hire employees who are passionate about your products and your mission. This enthusiasm will naturally spread to customers with which they interact.

Provide great products with desired features. It may seem obvious, but product features are the factor that advocates mention most when asked what makes them want to rave about a company.

Find out what your customers are passionate about, and create promotions that drive those factors. For example, many consumers are passionate about outstanding customer service; Nordstrom and Zappos are two companies that have taken note and created exceptional customer service—and many brand advocates.

Make it easy for brand advocates to cheer about you. Provide social links on your website product pages, articles, blogs and any other content you post online.



Consider offering rewards. Acknowledging brand advocates with discounts, freebies and special services can ensure they continue spreading the word. However, proceed carefully with this since other customers may be turned off if they believe you are “paying” advocates to share their enthusiasm.

Track and measure advocacy for your brand. Research the best online tools to use to determine what people are saying about you, and use the information to build future promotions.

Loyal brand advocates are more than just customers—they’re an informal extension of your marketing department. Nurture them and watch your business win!



SkyLine/SkyBest's Business Sales Executive Zara Worely (center left) stands with Red Dog co-owners Gayle Winston (left), Matt Milunic (center right) and Julie Milunic (right).

Red Dog Bar & Bistro

Growing popularity leads to a second location

A little mystery can make a place's history more intriguing. When people ask why there's a black cat in the logo of Red Dog Bar & Bistro, co-owners Matt Milunic, Julie Milunic and Gayle Winston are often hesitant to answer. They do, however, provide a warm atmosphere for customers to dine on American and international cuisine.

Happy Customers, Excellent Staff

Red Dog Bar & Bistro opened in June 2019 at the junction of Hwy 93 and Hwy 113 in Piney Creek, NC. The building had previously housed a few other restaurants, then sat empty for a couple of years. Now its cozy dining room is often full, with customers happily waiting for up to two hours for a table while they enjoy a drink in the bar.

What makes Red Dog Bar & Bistro so popular? Julie Milunic replied, "There are two reasons. First, we serve excellent food cooked fresh daily. Second, our staff—both front and back of house—are the best. They love Red Dog as much as I do."

Serving Up Local

The menu changes seasonally and features locally sourced foods including beef and lamb from Stony Knob Farm across the street, lettuce and microgreens from Baldwin Farm Fresh and the specialty beers named Red Dog Lager and Black Cat Stout from Laconia Ale Works.

Milunic noted, "Buying local when possible is big with us. It's important to support the local economy. Plus, local meats, produce and beverages just taste better. They're a bit more expensive, but worth it."

Local producers will also be on the list of suppliers when the second, and much larger, Red Dog Bar & Bistro opens at 203 E First St in West Jefferson, NC. That Ashe County location will begin serving customers in December 2023.

More Room in West Jefferson

"I've started referring to the two locations as little dog and big dog, given the size difference. The Red Dog Bar & Bistro in Piney Creek seats 25 in the dining room and has a staff of 13 or 14. In West Jefferson, we'll be able to seat about 115 people in the winter and about 170 during warmer months when the patio is in use. We expect the staff numbers in West Jefferson to be between 50 and 60," said Milunic.

“Buying local is big with us. It’s important to support the local economy. Plus, local meats, produce and beverages just taste better.”

— JULIE MILUNIC, CO-OWNER, RED DOG BAR & BISTRO

She added, “We’re hiring the employees from the West Jefferson building’s previous restaurant and are working hard to finish the painting and equipment upgrades at Red Dog Bar & Bistro so they can start earning money with us.”

SkyLine/SkyBest Connections

SkyLine/SkyBest has also been working at the second Red Dog Bar & Bistro location to get it equipped with our broadband internet and Hosted VoIP phone services.

Matt Milunic, Julie’s husband, weighed in on the performance of these SkyLine/SkyBest services: “The broadband internet gives us options on what download speed and pricing works best for us. Hosted VoIP offers more features than landlines do, which means we no longer need to worry about picking up on calls in progress. And when it comes to customer service and tech support, I think SkyLine/SkyBest is unparalleled. Techs respond quickly and knowledgeably whenever we have an issue.”

In addition to the two Red Dog Bar & Bistro locations, SkyLine/SkyBest provides broadband internet and Hosted VoIP phone services to another hospitality business jointly owned by the Milunics and Winston—River House Inn & Restaurant in Grassy Creek, NC. (You can read more about that beautiful property below.) River House Inn & Restaurant also subscribes to our



Managed Wi-Fi service, so its staff can focus on guests instead of routers and extenders.

Planning a special night out or weekend away? We encourage you to visit www.reddognc.com and www.riverhousenc.com/north_carolina_bed_and_breakfast.php for inspiration. You’ll get all your questions answered, except for why there’s a black cat in the Red Dog Bar & Bistro logo.



From Guests to Co-Owners at River House

Matt and Julie Milunic first met innkeeper Gayle Winston in 2004, when the Greensboro couple started visiting River House Inn & Restaurant in Grassy Creek almost monthly. They became close friends, and in 2016, she asked them for a favor.

Julie Milunic said, “Gayle was planning a three-week trip to Europe and asked if we’d stay at River House Inn & Restaurant to keep an eye on things while she was gone. After the three weeks, we knew we liked living there. Gayle urged us to sell our Greensboro house and move, and we decided to do just that. Soon we were Grassy Creek residents and, later, part owners of River House.”

River House Inn & Restaurant offers guests a true country experience. Walking trails wind through 160 acres, and there’s a mile of riverfront to enjoy. Most of its 12 guest rooms are converted farm buildings, decorated with art, books and country antiques. The restaurant is elegant but unpretentious, known for its great food and ambiance.

Grow With the Times to Grow Your Business

*To stay relevant and successful,
branch out and explore new
opportunities*



It's impressive to be a longstanding business with deep roots in the community. Keep in mind, however, that holding on too tightly to traditions from the past may be hurting your business in the present. Why? Because blindly following tradition causes us to turn off our brains and can get in the way of critical thinking, imagination and innovation.

Think about these questions: Do you handle tasks a certain way simply because that's the way you've always done them? Are you using outdated computer or communications technology? Do you still have the same marketing materials, merchandising displays or products that you had five years ago?

To foster growth, stay open to fresh ideas and encourage your employees to look for better and faster ways to do their jobs and serve your customers. Many resources are readily available which can help plant the seeds for new opportunities. For example, join a local business or community group to hear inspiring speakers and network with new people. Expand your knowledge by studying the success stories of businesses in other industries. Browse around Pinterest for images that may spark a more creative tactic for items such as your office interior, product packaging or advertising.

The U.S. Small Business Administration offered a variety of growth tips at www.sba.gov, including:

- **Offer your business as a franchise or business opportunity.** Franchising your business will allow for growth without requiring you to manage the new location. This will help to maximize the time you spend improving your business in other ways, too.

- **License your product.** This can be an effective, low-cost growth medium, particularly if you have a service product or branded product. Licensing also minimizes your risk and is low cost in comparison to the price of starting your own company to produce and sell your brand or product.
- **Form an alliance.** Partnering with a similar type of business can be a powerful way to expand quickly.
- **Diversify.** Diversifying is an excellent strategy for growth because it allows you to have multiple streams of income that can often fill seasonal voids. Some of the most common ways to diversify are to sell complementary products or services, teach adult education or other classes and become a paid speaker or columnist.
- **Target other markets.** Your current market may be serving you well, but are there others that could use your products?

To grow your business, it's important to take advantage of today's advanced communications services. For details about the solutions we offer, call 1-844-SKYBEST.

Businesses Improve Efficiency with VoIP

Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology has been available for many years, but some companies were initially resistant to using it. Their hesitation often stemmed from the perception that VoIP offered poor sound quality and availability could be affected if the company's internet service went down.

In actuality, today's VoIP systems offer sound quality that's clearer than traditional telephony as long as there's a solid internet connection. Many telecommunications providers allow business customers to set up disaster recovery routing using a preset cell phone or landline number. With disaster recovery routing, the VoIP system senses when the internet connection goes down and routes the call to another number.

Additional benefits of VoIP include:

- VoIP phone systems offer greater functionality than a traditional phone system. For example, they can provide a voicemail-to-email feature so users can get voicemail messages in their inboxes.
- A VoIP phone system is typically less expensive than a traditional phone system. Customers can expect up to 20 percent in savings.
- Businesses that use VoIP typically find their long-distance charges are reduced.



- VoIP users can take advantage of options for leasing their phone system.
- Businesses can convert their existing phone system to VoIP.
- VoIP systems are flexible and can be deployed in different ways, including a T1, PRI or SIP, depending on the needs of the business.
- VoIP phones can be used anywhere there is an internet connection, such as at employees' homes for work-from-home days.

Whether you have a small office with only a few phones or run a business with multiple sites, there's a VoIP solution for you.

If you think SkyBest Hosted Voice could be the right VoIP service for your business, call 1-844-SKYBEST or email www.businesssolutions@skyline.org to discuss the option with a SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive.

The Buy Local Loop is a Win-Win

The phrase "what goes around comes around" applies to many things, including your local economy. Here's how it works:

1. **You buy local.** You get to bring needed items back to the office the same day, skip the shipping costs and get an opportunity to know other business owners and employees.
2. **More business creates more jobs.** When you support those local businesses, you're also supporting neighbors, friends and relatives who can find jobs within them.
3. **More jobs create more spending power.** These residents can afford to spend money locally.
4. **Successful businesses support local nonprofits.** Nonprofit organizations receive twice as much support from small businesses as from larger ones.
5. **Local individuals and businesses support you back.** With a "buy local" mentality in your community, your business will benefit.
6. **You see the benefit and continue to buy local.** This starts the positive cycle all over again.





We appreciate doing business with you this past year! If you enjoy your SkyLine/SkyBest service, please refer us to your friends and neighbors.

► skybest.com/referafriend

Now offering a local referral program for realtors in select areas. Call for details!

1-844-SKYBEST

*Restrictions may apply.

