

Business Plus



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All ABOUT BUSINESS



debra gruszecki
&
k kaufmann

Sushi, Fios and a visit from Huell Howser

When a new restaurant has customers lining up before it's even open, it's got to be doing something right.

In the case of the **Venue Sushi Bar & Sake Lounge** on El Paseo, area residents were so insistently asking chef **Engin Onural** when he would open, he started letting a few in for a quick fix of his superfresh Japanese cuisine and gourmet sakes.

"All my dishes are exactly like me," said Onural, a few days after the restaurant opened on Jan. 25. "They're not ordinary."

Onural is not overstating his case. At 27, he has been sushi chef at two of the desert's top resorts: the **J.W. Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa** and the **Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa**.

And in addition to his culinary training at the Sushi Chef Institute in Los Angeles, he is also a sake sommelier.

Onural's back story is likewise extraordinary. The son of a distinguished Turkish engineer — Levent Onural, a leading figure in the development of 3-D television — Engin was born in Buffalo, N.Y., but raised in Turkey.

"I decided I was going to be in this business when I was 10," said Onural. "It's in my blood. I think I was Japanese in a past life."

The Venue should be an easy sell for the desert's sophisticated diners, mixing a sleek black and white decor with a menu featuring Onural's gourmet creations, along with a killer selection of sakes and exotic specialty drinks.

The Flor Dulce, for example, combines sparkling sake, edible hibiscus flower and hibiscus nectar.

Needless to say, the pre-opening regulars are still showing up — in some cases, even more regularly.

"This is exactly what I always pictured in my head the last 17 years," Onural said. "I think it's the right time to get started."

Chili club carne

Can you say **Huell Howser**?

Well, Palm Springs' beloved guru of tourism across the state who turns TV viewers into big-time travel bugs will be the guest speaker and judge for a Chili Cook-Off on Saturday, Feb. 26 by the **Palm Springs Woman's Club**.

Howser will discuss what goes on behind the scenes at "California's Gold" and will judge the goods in the crockery.

And get this: He's joining a team of judges who include **Jensen's** catering chef **Michael Passmore**; Vaudeville performer **Berks Baker**; Cheeta the Chimp owner and trainer **Dan Westfall**; and **KPSP Local 2** morning weathercaster **Karlene Chavis**.

Please see FIOS, D5



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SNYDER THE DESERT SUN

Keith McCormick, president of McCormick's Palm Springs Exotic Car Auctions, sits in his main showroom next to the 1966 Rolls Royce owned by local musician Trini Lopez. The car will go to auction during an upcoming sale.

McCormick's moving of masterpiece machinery

BY MIKE PERRAULT

The Desert Sun

Keith McCormick's auction company sold Tom Cruise's Ferrari, Rolls Royces belonging to Elizabeth Taylor, Frank Sinatra and G. Gordon Liddy, and even O.J. Simpson's white Ford Bronco.

They're among the some 18,000 vehicles — of which 12,492 have been successfully auctioned — valued at more than \$100 million that Keith McCormick's Palm Springs Exotic Car Auctions has displayed, said McCormick, the company's 63-year-old president.

"That's a piece of change, isn't it," said McCormick, a native of England who speaks with an obvious British accent.

He and his wife Desley will mark the exotic car firm's 25th anniversary when they host their 50th auction Feb. 25-27 at the Spa Resort Casino in downtown Palm Springs.

Nearly 600 vehicles will be on the block, including a 1966 Rolls Royce convertible with 66,000 miles on the odometer. Entertainer Trini Lopez wants to sell it nearly 45 years after purchasing it from Las Vegas casino mogul Bill Harrah.

Other vehicles to be auctioned include a 1928 Ford Model A pickup, a 1959 Austin Healey roadster, a 1928 Nash two-door coupe, and a 1936 Ford Woody.

Every February and November, the company attracts thousands of buyers, sellers and lookers to Palm Springs from around the world. Some are billionaires hunting for classics with fins; others are everyday car enthusiasts seeking bargains for as little as a few thousand dollars.

"We take cars for \$5,000 that some little old lady has had in her garage for 30 years," Keith McCormick said.

During its most recent auction in November, 276 vehicles sold for \$4.1 million, said McCormick, who excelled in math and history and keeps meticulous records in



A 1956 Thunderbird at McCormick's features blue and white interior.



A 1973 Plymouth Roadrunner, left, and a 1959 Chevrolet Impala are on display at McCormick's Palm Springs Exotic Car Auctions.



each transaction.

The recession has affected McCormick's in two ways: more classic car owners must sell, but they typically get a little less for their vehicles.

The company has evolved into a true family affair. Keith and Desley's son, Jason, serve as managers. Daughter Tania helps out during auctions, and Jason's wife, Julie, handles all-important Department of Motor Vehicle matters.

Jason works with car owners such as Douglas and Natasha Shaffer, who auctioned their 1971

Chevelle SS for \$63,000 and a 1960 Corvette for \$42,000.

Passersby often stop at McCormick's showroom at 244 N. Indian Canyon Drive when a car catches their attention.

"We're almost like a museum," Keith McCormick said with a laugh. "People pile out of tour buses. They want to walk in and kick the tires. We're OK with it."

McCormick's love of classic cars and the car-auction business came when he was 18 years old, a mechanic and living in England. He bought a classic Ford Thames

van for 5 pounds, spent four days fixing it up and sold it for 25 pounds.

"I thought really, it's a piece of history, and people want a piece of history," Keith McCormick said.

Keith still remembers tossing his earnings — a handful of 10 shilling notes — in the air and declaring, "We're going to be rich!"

The McCormicks discovered the "small-town, village atmosphere" of Palm Springs during vacations and, in 1981, they moved to the dry, warm city.

Keith McCormick had to convince longtime Palm Springs Mayor Frank Bogert to allow him to hold the first auction.

Since then, the car auctions have been held at numerous venues, from the Marquis and Riviera hotels to the city's convention center and now the Spa Resort Casino.

Now McCormick's auction company has become one of the biggest regional players, competing against big names such as Barrett-Jackson, Gooding & Co., Kruse, Leake and Mecum classic car auction companies.

McCormick's buyers have come from more than 20 countries, often because they prefer the rust-free conditions of many California cars.

"We export a lot of cars," McCormick said. "You can actually ship a car from our auction to Germany, including trucking it to the docks, for under \$2,000."

McCormick admits he sometimes is reluctant to let some cars go. He sold a 1924 Rolls Royce that once belonged to Britain's King Edward VIII, who abdicated the throne and is the subject of the Academy Award-nominated movie, "The King's Speech."

McCormick recalls sitting with Desley in the back seat of that "drop-dead" gorgeous car when it was parked inside their garage.

"You feel grand just to sit in it," he said.

SUNDAYCEO ■ Thomas Flavin

Seattle comes to the valley

BY DEBRA GRUSZECKI

The Desert Sun

Thomas Flavin's memory of the fallout from the departure of one of California's largest employers, Lockheed Corp., still stings.

Joblessness. Emptied storefronts. Decimated morale.

A downtrodden city that put most of its eggs in one basket had to regroup.

Then mayor of Burbank, Flavin had the vision to form partnerships with electric utilities to lay the groundwork for new communication technologies — coaxial cable and fiber-optic network — for cable TV, the Internet and interactive media.

What happened?

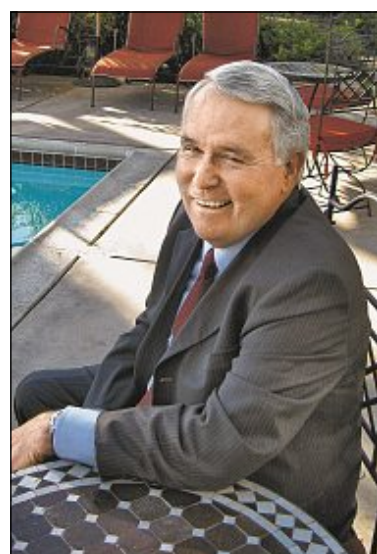
The city, once the brunt of jokes on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show," scored development agreements for Disney Studios and Warner Bros. expansions, Media City Mall, the Hilton Hotel & Convention Center and the AMC Theatre and Restaurant Complex.

He walked away with his own version of the Golden Globe: The American Planning Association's leadership award.

Today, Flavin said there was no Disney-like magic involved.

"It was simple, really," the newly hired CEO for the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership said.

Please see FLAVIN, D5



DEBRA GRUSZECKI THE DESERT SUN

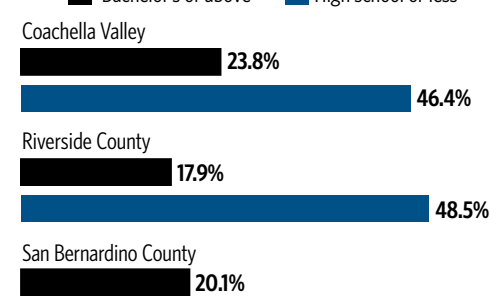
Thomas Flavin returns to California.

BUSINESSFACT

Valley education 101

The Coachella Valley has an adult population with a higher percentage of college education compared to Riverside and San Bernardino counties, but fewer high school graduates.

■ Bachelor's or above ■ High school or less



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2008

THE DESERT SUN

FiOS: Burgers from Tasmania, and Tinseltown tickets

Continued from D1

The action, costing \$20 to eat and \$50 to compete for cash prizes, begins at 1 p.m. Proceeds will be used to improve the clubhouse of the historic organization founded by Palm Springs pioneers from Nellie Coffman and Warren B. Pinney to Pearl McManus.

FiOS sales are 'right on track'

Verizon California has had quite a presence in the Coachella Valley in recent weeks, given the number of FiOS TV truck sightings along busy highways, streets and bustling residential communities.

Verizon Communications Inc. in December rolled out FiOS TV, Internet and telephone services to connect a potential 52,000 homes and 3,000 businesses in Bermuda Dunes, Coachella, Indian Wells, Indio, La Quinta and Palm Desert.



DEBRA GRUSZECKI THE DESERT SUN

Verizon utility trucks in the desert serve as rolling billboards for the new FiOS service available in some Coachella Valley cities.

One month into installation, Verizon spokesman **Les Kumagai** said sales are "right on track."

To keep the momentum going, the company's hasn't only turned all of its utility trucks into mobile FiOS billboards.

It's staging a "FiOS Movie Mania" night for the community on Thursday at the Cinemas Palme d'Or in Palm Desert.

"We'll be offering Coachella Valley residents a chance to see one of 10 current movies, and win a 52-inch HDTV or a free trip to a black-tie awards viewing party in Hollywood. Cinema seats are limited, so find free tickets in advance on Verizon's website. Printed confirmation tickets must be presented 30 minutes before show time.

Kumagai says popcorn and a soft drink can also be had with one catch: Take in a FiOS TV demo or do a service availability check. Be forewarned, Kumagai said: "Paparazzi-like photographers will be on hand to take photos as the movie-goers arrive."

Eco-beef unwinds at the GRIND

The saying "Beefing it up" has gained new meaning as the new **GRIND BRGR BaR** makes its debut atop **Kaiser Restaurant Group's** popular **Chop House** in Palm Springs.

Proprietor **Lee Morcus** says

this eatery with a sports theme and multiple flat-screen TVs will offer the "best burger in the desert."

The burgers are definitely unique, and their ingredients steer far afield from a classic, Black Angus ranch.

GRIND BRGR BaR's signature burgers are made with beef from 100 percent, natural grass-fed cattle that graze on one of the most pristine islands of the planet, Tasmania, Australia.

If Australia is too far afield, other offerings on the menu provide fare closer to home. Think, free-range turkey burgers, lump crab cake burgers and a land-and-sea combo of grass-fed beef with three grilled prawns or a four-ounce lobster tail.

Customers also can try their hand at the "Game of the Week" burger: Choices based on availability may range from venison and wild boar to elk and antelope.

The restaurant concept was



DEBRA GRUSZECKI THE DESERT SUN

New eatery above the Chop House on Palm Canyon Drive promises to GRIND out a new vibe and burgers made with grass-fed beef.

driven by two key factors: Price points play into consumer pocketbooks — \$7 to \$15.

"We've been mindful of environmental concerns," Morcus said. "Our meats are raised naturally; our produce is from local grocers and organic whenever possible."

For more information

■ **Venue Sushi Bar & Sake Lounge:** 73-111 El Paseo, Palm Desert. Hours: 4-10 p.m. Monday to Saturday. Hours today, for the Super Bowl, noon to 9:30 p.m. Information: (760) 346-1500

■ **Palm Springs Women's Club,** 314 S. Cahuilla Road, Palm Springs. Contact for an application or ticket, (760) 320-6356 or e-mail sharinperrydz@gmail.com

■ **FiOS Movie Mania,** at the Cinemas Palme d'Or on Feb. 10 ticket information and reservations, www.verizon.com/excitement

■ **GRIND BRGR BaR,** 262 S. Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, a live DJ playing classic rock and music from the decades of the '60s, '70s and '80s from Thursday through Saturday nights. Phone, (760) 325-5200, and online, www.grindbrgrbar.com

Do you have local small business news? Share it with us at business@thedesertsun.com

YOUR BUSINESS YOUR NEWS

job changes

David Stewart of UC Riverside was recently welcomed by the **Coachella Valley Economic Partnership** to the organization's board of directors. Stewart, Dean of the UCR School of Business Administration, will now serve as UCR's representative to the CVEP Board.

David Justin Lynch & Associates, a law firm in Palm Springs, has added two new people to its staff.

■ **Frank Riela** has joined the firm as

an associate attorney focusing on business litigation, personal injury, real property, probate, and worker's compensation cases.

■ **Audrey Q. Overholt** is the new worker's compensation case manager. She will assist attorneys in obtaining maximum benefits for injured workers.

openings & movings

Milan Institute of Cosmetology has opened at 47-120 Dune Palms, Suite D,

in La Quinta. Milan Institute has been preparing students for the workforce since 1985 and has 18 campuses throughout the western United States. Information: (760) 771-5520

The DogSpa Resort & Wellness Center, a dog-friendly retreat for pet owners, has opened at 67-840 Hacienda Ave. in Desert Hot Springs. Amenities include a pool and spa naturally heated by hot mineral spring water, a pet nanny, and pet health and wellness consultations available on site by owner and holistic veterinarian,

Paula Terifaj, DVM. Reservations and information: (760) 600-0246; www.dogspareresort.com

philanthropy

Zumba Coachella Valley has donated a \$750 grant to the **Ophelia Project.** The grant is matched by Pathways To Success, resulting in a \$1,500 scholarship to be awarded to an Ophelia girl at the scholarship luncheon on May 12.

recognition

Granite Construction Co.'s hot mix asphalt and aggregate plant in Indio was one of six **Gold Award Environmental Excellence** winners throughout the United States. The National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association awards program recognized aggregate operations throughout the United States and Canada for their extraordinary commitment to safety, superior performance as environmental stewards and for their community involvement.

FLAVIN: New CEO brings vast wealth of experience

Continued from D1

"We sat down and talked."

A Disney executive suggested building a fiber-optic network to connect the studio to the vacated Lockheed property.

"I said, 'Why not put it downtown, too? That way, we get three major downtown centers.'

"We built out own fiber-optic system through our electric utility, and guess what? In the middle of the 1990s, the whole new media merged. Burbank is sitting there with the infrastructure the industry is looking for and in comes Yahoo."

Sometimes, it takes a crisis to sort things out.

Flash-forward to 2011 and Flavin — who landed here by way of Seattle — sees great opportunity for innovative economic growth, as well.

"Burbank taught me that every region on the map has potential, some more than others."

"This is one such place."

Beyond Burbank, you've led the charge in many other major cities as well. Drawing from them, what's the mantra you're carrying here?

Besides the fact that you never, ever take your economic well-being for granted, you've got to position yourself in the front-end of opportunity. If you're in the middle of the pack, or in the back, forget it: You're not going to be successful.

You're no stranger to the valley, either — as you grew up in the L.A. metro area, and visited periodically over the years. So let's get to it: What's the valley's prognosis for the future?

I think it's got a great future. The more I learn, the more I'm impressed.

One strong suit is it has a lot of things that go beyond the cluster base. It has a sense of community; that's important. That makes it easier to get groups to rally around a common interest.

CVEP's been working hard to erase parochialism. What's your view on handling that?

Economic development has its pockets. I see it as silos of special interest. Everybody is protecting theirs.

When I was in Denver, companies would come up from L.A. and I would say, "Look, the first thing you have to understand is there's

a big difference between Denver and L.A."

What makes diverse development work is that sense of common interest that allows the community to build transportation systems, schools, sports facilities, cultural facilities and the like.

The Coachella Valley has common interest in spades. It's large enough to be attractive; small enough to get things done. It's an international brand on top of it.

Initial thoughts on the blueprint?

Basically data driven, it was compiled by knowledgeable people who have been around a lot longer than I have. It highlights definite opportunities with the healthcare and lifestyle cluster, clean tech and renewable energy cluster, creative arts and design cluster and the supply chain management and logistics cluster.

But I've been around long enough to know there are always things percolating out in the economy. It can also develop at a sub-cluster level; or something could happen as a catalyst to create a cluster community. You've got to be quick to spot them, mobilize and execute a plan to capitalize on it.

You hail from blueprint country, Seattle: Tell us about your experience with its "Prosperity Partnership" plan.

The Puget Sound region, a four-county area with 3.2 million people, identified 14 industry clusters above the national average in terms of job concentration. We proactively worked the top five, focusing on aerospace, IT, international trade, life science and clean tech. We concentrated on companies who were ready to expand or were companies from outside who showed an interest in Puget Sound.

What unique discoveries did you make with regard to the Seattle plan?

In the IT cluster, amid the Microsoft and Googles of this world, we found the digital game industry and interactive media sub-cluster. It turned out to be the fastest growing industry in the region. What's interesting was, they'd been working under the label of entertainment.

We said, "Gee, we have 150 companies, big ones like (Microsoft) Xbox, Sony and



MICHAEL SNYDER THE DESERT SUN

Thomas Flavin, president and CEO of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership.

Nintendo, and small ones, too. When we put it all together, we found out this sub-cluster was bringing in 14 percent of the revenues in this global market.

That led me to believe, and it proved out later, that a lot of industries will either be created or transformed by the technology expertise that existed in the region. In this case, it happened largely because Seattle had a lot of IT people floating around.

Great example. How about another one?

Before I left, we heard Washington State University had this curriculum in fashion and apparel. I'm thinking, old textile stuff. That wasn't it at all; it changed. Almost all the design work is done by computer now; actual fabrication is done in Asia.

Well, Seattle has Pacific Rim connections. And all the major industry like Costco and Nordstrom are involved in that process. We found out there are 35,000 jobs in this cluster.

Leapfrogging to the Coachella Valley, how would this strategy work here?

We don't create jobs with

CVEP; we work with companies who will create them. A lot of times, they have a variety of needs; and they need to have access to capital. Maybe it's business planning, legal services, site selection or knowledge about network providers here.

What metric will you use to measure CVEP's success?

We are in a global competition for jobs. Good-paying jobs are at the top of the list. The availability of a talented workforce is really key in the 21st Century. That's why CVEP, through its Pathways to Success and Career Pathways Initiative, has been engaged in that for the last several years. Their goal is to ensure there is a talented workforce.

Besides getting acclimated with valley leaders, what's the first task on your punch list?

I'm working on the business plan now. In it, we ID what our outcomes are. For me, it comes down to three areas: Primary jobs, total jobs and economic impact — the elements which create the tax base for the region. That's quantifiable.

Applying that metric to Seattle, what Puget Sound regional accomplishments can you cite?

In Seattle, during our run, we created about 4,500 new primary jobs. That translated into another 4,000-plus total jobs and about \$1.5 billion in economic impact.

What motivates you to diversify the economy?

I go back to my first stint in California. I'm convinced California took its economic well-being for granted.

I think the aerospace industry is a classic example of that. For 45 years after World War II, it was the single biggest industry cluster in Southern California. When Lockheed made its announcement on May 3, 1990, the landscape changed dramatically.

Seattle's facing the same thing today. Charleston just took Boeing's second 787 line. Boeing wanted some predictability associated with producing those planes; they didn't feel the Seattle market was providing that.

We'll see if Seattle gets the Boeing tanker line. I'm hoping like hell they do because I got a house not far from Boeing I've got to sell.

For the Coachella Valley, what clusters do you see coming out of the gate first?

This region is uniquely positioned in renewable energy. But we can't ignore the potential for sub-cluster development. The motor sport project in Thermal strikes me as one sub-cluster with potential to grow the economy in unique ways.

Here's how it worked in Seattle: It didn't have pharmaceutical manufacturing as a base. The medical device industry popped up when we found concentration of jobs in that area.

In Colorado, I did a consulting job in 2004 and found artisans working from their home on the western slope who were making product they sold around the world. It led to a real arts economy. That's how it works.

After we ID the nexus codes, we'll have a better idea of what to focus on.

The valley has a tendency to fall into an east versus west mode when it comes to planning. How do you plan to address that?

I'm going to propose, along with opening the business center across from Palm Springs City Hall, a satellite office in east valley for two reasons: One, the renewable projects are out there. The potential automotive cluster opportunities are there. And, I want to learn more about agriculture.

Tourism and agriculture didn't show up on the blueprint, yet they are backbone industries. Will they be excluded?

Not in the least. That's why you have the cluster focus. I'd like to learn more about the wine production here.

On tourism, I'm talking with the CVA's new CEO, Scott White, and we have shared board members who want to work closely together.

It's a wonderful channel to identify leads, push branding and marketing and keep the Palm Springs name in the forefront of everybody's minds.

All this said, throw us one of your best mantras.

Play to your strengths.

Debra Gruszecki covers tourism, CVEP and Indian gaming for The Desert Sun. She can be reached at Debra.Gruszecki@thedesertsun.com or (760) 778-4643.