

**Second Entrepreneur's Forum to Highlight Local Business Owners**  
**by Courtney Hunt, The Eureka Reporter**  
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Humboldt County residents will have the opportunity to interact with the owners of several local businesses Thursday from 6-7:30 p.m. at Humboldt State University's Kate Buchanan Room.

As part of the Economic Fuel business plan contest, Sun Valley Floral Farms owner Lane DeVries, HealthSPORT owner Susan Jansson, Marimba One owner Ron Samuels, Fire & Light owner John McClurg and Footprint Recycling owner Andrew Cooper will be available to speak with community members about their enterprises.

A native of the Netherlands, DeVries is the fourth-generation member in his family to enter the flower-growing industry. He moved to Arcata in 1983 after securing a position at Sun Valley, which at that time was owned by an Oregon-based company.

DeVries and two other Dutch bulb growers bought the business out of bankruptcy in 1991 and the trio hasn't looked back since. Today, the company is estimated to be seven times its size in 1991 in terms of overall sales.

"I guess it's in my veins," DeVries said of his career growing flowers. "I probably wouldn't know what else to do."

Susan Jansson may not know much about flowers, but has built a local business in a similar fashion to that of DeVries. After purchasing Valley West Fitness Center from its original owners in 1986 along with her husband Erik, Jansson was approached by officials from the City of Arcata to start a health club in a new park they were planning.

HealthSPORT opened in 1994 and now includes facilities in Fortuna and McKinleyville as well as the original Arcata location. Much of its success can be attributed to persistence from the Janssons, who co-own the business.

"My biggest challenge was overcoming everybody else saying 'It'll never work in Arcata,'" she said. "They said, 'Arcata's too small. It'll never make money.'"

Currently, Jansson holds the position as CEO of HealthSPORT and still teaches aerobic classes and personal training sessions on the side.

The third entrepreneur featured at Thursday's forum is Fire & Light owner John McClurg. Graduates of HSU, McClurg and his wife Natali bought the company in 1999, three years after its inception in 1995.

Formerly a CPA and small business consultant, McClurg was looking for something different and recognized the recycled glass products manufacturing company as something he was interested in.

"I enjoy everything from the recycling and firing of the glass to the sales and management involved with running the business," he said.

Though he likes being self-employed, McClurg cautioned that it is the harder path to take.

"It's a lot of fun but there are also a lot of day-to-day challenges. Running your own business, it's never smooth sailing for more than a couple of days at a time. This is a rapidly changing world and there are always things coming up to deal with," he said.

Another entrepreneur that will be present at the forum is Marimba One founder Ron Samuels. A piano enthusiast for years, Samuels fell in love with the sound made by marimbas and, after learning to build the instruments, started a business selling them in 1986.

These days, Marimba One ships marimbas to various parts of the world from its location in Arcata. Although Humboldt County is one of the worst places to ship from, Samuels has no intention of moving the company.

"For me, I've always been committed to staying in Humboldt County," he said.

"Something that I really believe is important is to have something that demands high dollar so that the ratio, the values of the goods to shipping them out of the area, is acceptable."

The last business owner featured as part of the entrepreneur's forum is Andrew Cooper, founder of Footprint Recycling. Based in Arcata, the company that creates biodiesel from waste vegetable oil started as an offshoot of Cooper's thesis project at HSU in 2001 and was officially given the Footprint name after he received a \$25,000 grant in 2003.

Though Cooper eventually separated the thesis and business from each other, he is happy with his decision to start the company because the benefits of owning his own business outweigh the detriments.

“One major benefit is the accomplishment of successfully running your own business and pride for the type of business that was created,” he said. “Everyone here can all feel gratification and self worth through all that.”

In addition, Cooper has enjoyed the flexibility his schedule now offers.

For more information about Economic Fuel’s entrepreneur’s forum on Thursday, visit [www.economicfuel.com](http://www.economicfuel.com).

#### Timeline of Events

##### March 2006

- Thursday, March 2: Community Lecture Series: Entrepreneur’s Forum with local business owners. Humboldt State University’s Kate Buchanan Room, University Center, 6-7:30 p.m. Guests will include Sun Valley Floral Farms CEO Lane DeVries, HealthSPORT owner Susan Jansson, Fire & Light owner John McClurg, Marimba One owner Ron Samuels and Footprint Recycling owner and founder Andrew Cooper.
- Thursday, March 9: Entrepreneurial Thursday: Strategic Marketing with College of the Redwoods professor Christopher Gaines and Humboldt State University Professor Nancy Vizenor. HSU Founders Hall 118, 6-7:30 p.m.
- Thursday, March 30: Entrepreneurial Thursday: “Business Plan Financials” with Humboldt State University Professor Mike Thomas and College of the Redwoods Professor Helen Edwards. Humboldt State University, Founders Hall 118, 6-7:30 p.m.