

Informal Referral Network at California Parcel Plus Center

By Susan Murphy

In the nearly five years they have been in the pack and ship business, Parcel Plus owners Frank and Tana Schimberg in Antioch, California, have come to understand the true meaning of success in business: meeting needs, building relationships and promoting others. Casually referring their customers to other area small businesses has created an informal referral network that meets needs while serving to stimulate the local economy.

“We’ve met an awful lot of nice people since we’ve been in business,” said Frank. “We give out business cards for several businesses who are our customers: a vacuum repair shop, a cosmetologist, a pastry company – even the dog trainer who trains our local police department’s dogs. And they do the same for us.”

The dog trainer trained Max, the golden retriever puppy the Schimbergs got about a year ago. Max “works” at the center along with Frank, Tana and Tammy, their business development associate. “Max is our customer ambassador and greeter,” said Frank. “Having him there creates an opportunity for conversation and seems to help people warm up to us a lot quicker. He’s a relationship builder. People bring in treats for him all the time. Last year, a lady even brought a Christmas stocking for Max full of dog treats.”

Making a welcoming atmosphere, offering personalized service and paying attention to detail has won the Schimbergs longtime customers and opportunities for new business.

“We are all about attention to detail and service,” said Frank. “I can’t tell you how many times going the extra mile has saved us.”

Keeping an eye out for customers has always been part of Frank and Tana’s customer care strategy. One man gave an incorrect address when trying to ship auto parts Next Day Air. An unusual spelling of a street name gave Frank pause, so he decided to Google it. “We always have a Web browser running for just such occasions,” he said. “The customer was so grateful that I checked the spelling of the street; otherwise, his parts wouldn’t have made it on time.”

Frank’s background in real estate has served him – and his customers – well in his notary business. When a customer brought a document into his center to be notarized Frank noticed something suspicious. He cautioned that he wasn’t a lawyer, but suggested the customer revisit one of the items in the document before signing it. As it turns out, Frank was correct. His customer couldn’t have been more grateful. “We always do the best we can to make the customer happy,” said Frank. The customer came back with a gift certificate to Home Depot to show his appreciation.



Frank and Tana Schimberg and “Max”

In addition to a notary business that pulls in approximately \$1,000 per month, the Schimbergs also offer passports, document shredding, name badges, rubber stamps, color and B&W copying, candles and greeting cards to their staple business of shipping and mailbox rentals. “Tammy (the business developer) knows everybody in town,” said Frank. “She talks to local business owners and remembers all of their kids. She brings in a lot of print business for us.”

One of the printing projects they do that is making a difference to graduating high school seniors and their schools is a “grad night” memory collage, an 11 x 17 collection of photos. The Schimbergs give back \$1 per collage, nearly a third of the cost of it, in an effort to support two participating local high schools.

Helping others has had not only a good effect on the Schimberg’s business, but also on their social lives. “A customer we met through the store has become a friend,” said Frank. “The couple invited us for a barbecue to celebrate their daughter’s wedding – and we don’t even live in the same town.” The invitation was based on the relationship they established at Parcel Plus. “We *have* met a lot of nice people,” said Frank. ♦