

Nanos, Nik

Trenton native now runs successful polling company

BY BETH PRIMEAU

Quinte West - Nik Nanos remembers as a child tobogganing down Mount Pelion. He also remembers picking apples in an orchard behind Trenton High School for extra cash.

And, although Nanos now lives in Ottawa, his fond memories of the area are still evident. "It was a really great town to grow up in. There was a lot to do, everybody knew everybody else and from a kid's perspective that is not a problem."

These days, Nanos, along with his younger brother John, run SES Research, one of the top corporate research companies in the country.

Established in 1987, SES Research is a full service market and public research firm that does telephone surveys, online surveys, and conducts focus groups.

"We are hired by companies to do research on products. To do customer satisfaction surveys to test advertising," said Nanos. "What most people see are the political polls we do. Those are the ones in the paper all the time."

SES Research does the political polling for the Sun Media chain of newspapers that includes The Community Press.

And, doing political polls is exactly how Nanos first got started in the market research business. While attending Queen's University in Kingston, a friend of the family who had recently been nominated as a local candidate for the provincial election showed Nanos a proposal he had received for a poll.

"I remember he showed me the proposal to get my opinion and it was for \$10,000. Being a struggling student, \$10,000 was a lot of money so I told him instead of hiring the other company out of Toronto he could hire me and I would do a lot more research for the same budget."

From that first job, a pollster was born. Because political polling is not a big money maker, Nanos began surveying local businesses. Having no previous experience doing business surveys and having never worked for a market research company, getting his first busi-



Nik Nanos

ness client, a computer store, posed somewhat of a challenge.

"I told him (the owner) I didn't have a computer and that he would be my first business client. I said, 'Okay here is what I propose. You pay me in computer equipment and I'll do the survey for you and if you are not happy with the survey I'll bring everything back.'"

These days, Nanos has no problem attracting clients

with his reputation for predicting. In the last provincial election, Nanos said his company did a "great job" predicting the results.

In the last federal election, SES Research was able to predict the outcome within one tenth of one percentage point for all the major parties, which was one of the best election predictions in polling history.

In the 2004 federal election, SES Research was the only polling firm to point to the liberals winning a minority government.

Although these polls aren't big money makers, Nanos said they are done to demonstrate the competency of his company. "If you can predict the outcome of an election, people have a lot more confidence in you as a researcher."

Predicting results and doing market research can, at times, be stressful for Nanos. "I never thought I would have a job where everyone would know my level of competence and would be able to measure it when an election day comes," he said. "It's stressful, but at the same time if you have good methodology and do a good job it is quite rewarding."

According to Nanos, the best part of his job is being able to learn something new every day. "One day I could be doing a survey on who Canadians think is the best prime minister and the next day I might be doing a taste test for Kentucky Fried Chicken or Subway... that is the fun part, even though I am the expert I learn something in every single project I do."

SES Research has offices in Toronto and Ottawa. It is also a part of a broader group of companies with offices in Halifax, Montreal and Vancouver.