

Businesses have reason for optimism

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Larry Lavine doesn't pay much attention to studies.

"We judge things by how much the phone is ringing," said the Newmarket entrepreneur.

He said small businesses are coming out of a dismal start to 2003 and looking at

"I think, by nature, we're a confident lot," said Mr. Lavine, who operates a carpet and upholstery cleaning business.

"Looking at this year, it's fairly easy to feel confident."

Mr. Lavine's view is backed up by at least two recent studies that indicate a resurgence of confidence

economic shocks" in the first part of the year, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Respondents to the CFIB's quarterly business barometer survey for the third quarter indicated an increased level of confidence among business people, with firms expressing optimism outnumbering those with more pessimistic views.

The survey indicated 39 per cent of business owners see their firms as performing better than they were one year ago, with 31 per cent saying they are doing worse.

And 49 per cent of respondents indicated optimism for the coming year, the CFIB reported.

Short-term expectations over the next three to 12 months show improvement from those expressed earlier this year, Ted Mallett, chief economist with the CFIB, said.

Meanwhile, the most recent manpower employment outlook survey predicts a steady hiring pace for York Region employers.

The survey shows, for the final quarter of the year, 20 per cent of companies interviewed plan to hire, while 70 per cent expect to maintain their current staff levels. Layoffs were predicted by 10 per cent of companies surveyed.

The survey findings are

promising, especially coming after several months during which circumstances have combined to deliver a number of blows to the economy, Lori Procher, vice-president, Manpower Canada, said.

"For a year in which the Canadian economy has faced many challenges, including a rising dollar, SARS and mad cow disease, employer confidence has remained somewhat healthy throughout 2003," Ms Procher said.

Mr. Lavine agrees the poor start to the year makes the current climate for business appear quite favourable.

"It has really been a year of contrast," he said.

He points to March, which, for him, is a typically slow time. This year, it was his worst month in eight years of business.

"It was not only the lowest, but by a healthy margin it was the lowest," Mr. Lavine said.

By contrast, July was one of the best months ever for the business, he said.

Mr. Lavine said whatever happens, entrepreneurs are a resilient bunch who know the ebbs and flows of the economy and are adfor Manpower Canada, said.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

WET WEATHER REFRESHMENT

Emma Nixon, 4, didn't let last Saturday's damp weather reduce her spirits as she braved the elements to pass out refreshments to runners during the Hands and Feet Run in support of Habitat for Humanity at Milne Dam Conservation Park.

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FOCUS ON BUSINESS

Should I buy a new sofa or reupholster my existing one?

Who should you turn to for an objective answer? Bill Rizk of Markham Furniture is the best person to answer such a question.

"We could build you a new sofa or chair in fabric or leather, or reupholster your existing one right in our shop," says Mr. Rizk. "In most cases, we can restore your existing sofa to its original glory and beauty at less than the cost of buying a comparable new one."

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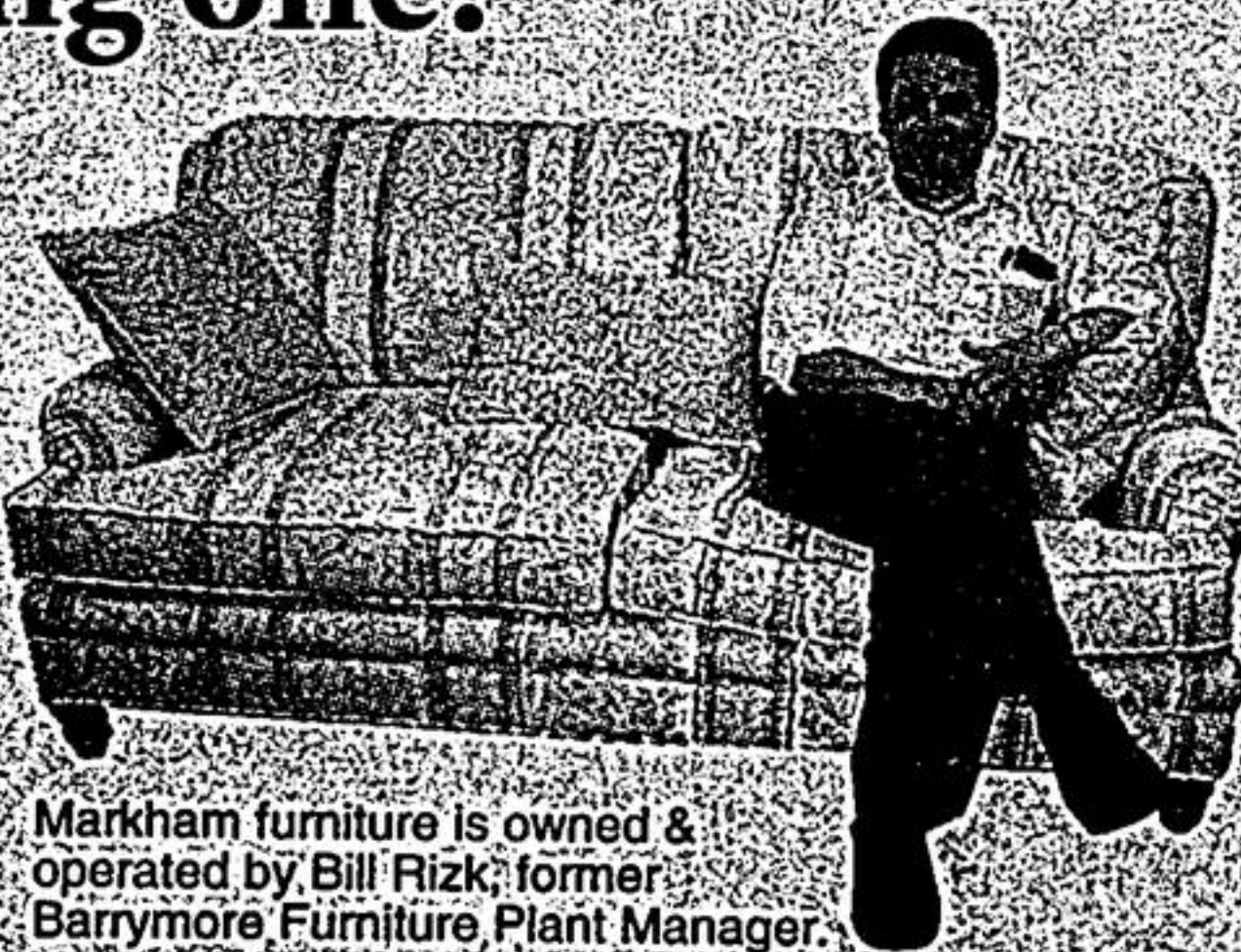
The prices are substantially less than comparable sofas sold in fine retail stores.

NEW INTRODUCTIONS

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Markham furniture is owned & operated by Bill Rizk, former Barrymore Furniture Plant Manager.

Recliners, dining chairs or tub chairs are restored to their original beauty and design.

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