

# Vending and Coffee Service Company Celebrates 60 Years in the SCV

By Jana Adkins  
SCVBJ Editor

What started out as one-truck catering service and a single delivery route in Saugus 60 years ago has grown into a Santa Clarita-based concession vending business and coffee service for businesses.

Begun by Gene Burke in 1955 with the help of a Helms Bakery truck, is today owned and operated as Santa Clarita Concessions by daughter Lisa Burke, who took over the business in 1997.

The business has morphed a bit, however, as a result of the crushing recession. Whereas the company once had numerous food trucks on the road to service workers at the vast number of construction sites for the heightened residential and commercial building that was taking place in the past two-plus decades, the falloff of the economy changed all that.

## Re-sizing

"When the economy was booming we had 23 mobile catering trucks on the road. Business was phenomenal; construction and everything was booming," Burke said. "But during the recession the catering trucks suffered the most. There was no construction, it almost completely came to a halt, and companies were laying off employees or shutting down. No one had to have a catering truck anymore; it was a perk. People were losing their pay or jobs and began bringing their lunch to work."

By 2011, the company was down to only seven catering trucks and ended up selling that portion of the firm's business to concentrate heavily on its growing vending and coffee service, a decision Burke described as a "good move" but not without heartache. "It was heartbreaking; it emotionally de-

*"We became a one-stop shop. One phone call and we handled it all from catering trucks, to vending machines and coffee service."*

— Lisa Burke

Owner, Santa Clarita Concessions

stroyed me because that was where we started, what my dad had started," Burke said. "But we see business slowly coming back. It is definitely better than it was in 2008, now that we don't have catering we can concentrate so much more on our vending and coffee business and channel all our energy in that. "We're the only company out here that does both; we're still a one-stop shop."

Burke remained connected, however, with the people who bought the catering trucks and refers the business that still comes into Santa Clarita Concessions looking for the food trucks. She passes all the requests on to the new mobile catering truck owners now.

When the company first branched out



■ Santa Clarita Concessions owner Lisa Burke checks inventory in the commissary. Photo by Dan Watson

into the vending machine business. Six Flags Magic Mountain and Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital were the firm's first customers, and the hospital remains one today.

With 10 employees, four of whom are family members, and five vending routes, Santa Clarita Concessions trucks can be spotted on the streets throughout SCV and beyond as it services numerous companies. The firm has branched out a little to the San Fernando and Antelope valleys, in large part because as companies relocated they wanted to take their service with them.

"One company moved to Moorpark from Santa Clarita years ago," Burke said. "We serviced them here and we service them in Moorpark now."

But, what began as a single truck and route business grew into the largest catering and concession company in the Santa Clarita Valley on the request of a single customer.

## Vending machines

When not in use, Burke's dad used to park his catering truck in Saugus where a dairy once stood along Bouquet Canyon Road. As a dairy made way for a new high school, Burke moved the truck over to Thatcher Glass Company on Springbrook Avenue across from the Saugus café. The glass company offered Burke's dad space to park his truck.

From that parking space, the business began to grow and the founder ventured out changing from a "cold truck" to three-sided trucks which could heat up pre-prepared foods, Burke said. Then the company came out with mobile kitchens in its trucks. And as the business grew, so did it outgrow its space behind Thatcher's Glass Company.

In 1979 Santa Clarita Concessions

moved to Golden Triangle Road, more companies opened in the SCV, industrial parks were built and the need for services grew. But it was while the company was still parking at Thatcher Glass that Burke's dad was approached and asked if he had "any of those machines that you could buy snacks and beverages from," she said.

That was back in the mid-1960s, she said, but her dad answered, "No, but I do now," Burke said. The name of the company was changed to Burke's Vending and Catering at the time, although it later changed its name to reflect the business area it serviced to Santa Clarita Concessions in 1997.

"We became a one-stop shop," Burke said. "One phone call and we handled it all from catering trucks, to vending machines and coffee service."



■ Santa Clarita Concessions General Manager Johnny Costa restocks the shelves in the commissary. Photo by Dan Watson

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## Tight profit margins

Providing coffee decanters and brewing machinery at no cost, the company only asks in exchange that a firm buy all of their coffee supplies from Santa Clarita Concessions. With so many brands and tastes, the company offers everything from Starbucks, to Folgers and Don Francisco's and more. It also maintains the decanters, swapping them out when they need to be cleaned.

As for its vending service, the machines are state-of-the-art, even taking credit cards while the company works to stay on top of new technology, Burke said. In terms of stocking the machines, Santa Clarita Concessions tries to keep costs priced less than a convenience store, while bringing the convenience to the employees.

As can be imagined, profit margins are

See **VENDING**, page 17



# Startups at City's Business Incubator 'On Track' and Now Employ 14 People

By Jana Adkins  
SCVBJ Editor

In less than a year since Santa Clarita's Business Incubator opened the first startup entrepreneurs are already paying rent and hiring employees, said an analyst with the city's economic development division.

And as of the four startups that first moved into the incubator, collectively they already have 14 employees including the owner.

"All are on track to meet their goals for the first year. And they're growing a lot faster than we expected," said Karla Monterrosa for the city. "We offered them free rent for the first six months and now we're giving them space at a very low cost."

Kovariant, an analytics-based company focusing on creating virtual reality products for marketing major retailers and brands, has already hired seven people and has plans to hire more before the end of the year, she said.

"They're really exciting, just very dynamic and energetic," Monterrosa said. "They bring an interesting energy to the building."

Nuhubit Software Studios LLC creates educational video games for children, and has hired two employees.

"They're now an official Apple developer with a video game for Apple phones and tablets," Monterrosa said. "They have hired two employees."

Thinkquarium Entertainment creates original content to drive demand in the entertainment field, and they're also now partnering with Kovariant, having produced a 5-minute animated story to be used to attract investors.

"The incubator is working as intended," Monterrosa said. "We sought to have the incubator allow businesses to be creative and help each other."

Your Village Inc., the fourth startup, is a subscription-based service that provides online parenting workshops and coaching. It's also already developed 31 online workshops and is nearly ready to launch their website. The startup has hired a part-time editor and is recruiting for an intern as well.

"They've all expressed how much it helped them to move to professional office outside of the home," Monterrosa said.

Mentors in the fields of educational software, video gaming, digital marketing, crowdfunding and international business development have been lined up by the Small Business Development Center to meet the growth needs of the startups.

Santa Clarita's Business Incubator is



■ Robert Bruza (left); founder of Kovariant; an analytics technology company for the entertainment and media. Photo by Austin Dave.

also hosting an Open House, complete with lunch, Oct. 15 from 12 to 2 p.m. for anyone who is interested in stopping by and learning more about the companies and their products. The event is

co-sponsored by the city and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation. For those interested in meeting the business owners at the open house, people can register online at [www.innovate.la](http://www.innovate.la). ■

## VENDING

Continued from page 15

tight though. Operating no differently than a grocery or convenience store, the company has to not only compete on pricing, but, unlike a grocery store it has to pay sales tax on every food item sold. People don't realize there are hidden costs, Burke said.

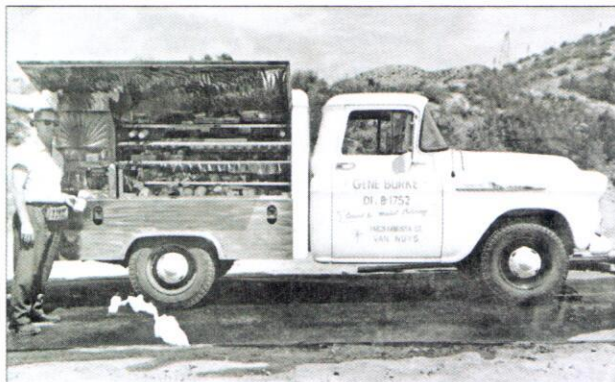
"The biggest challenge we face in the industry is pricing. The hardest thing is to have to raise prices, and yet we don't want to go out and complain or explain our (business) challenges. But it's tough doing business in California," Burke said. "We will kindly explain to management when we have to raise prices and people are a little more receptive now that the economy has picked up; they're a little more understanding now."

If she has to run a business in California,

however, Burke said she wouldn't do it anywhere other than Santa Clarita. The city really looks out for small business owners, she said. As for the region as a whole, the company is grateful for how other companies have supported the small business.

As a result, Burke and her family remain very involved in supporting the community in return by servings on numerous boards from the hospital, to College of the canyons Foundation, Boys & Girls Club of Santa Clarita, American Cancer Society in Santa Clarita, and more. Her mom just received an award at Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital's 40th anniversary gala last month, Burke said. Born and raised here herself, Burke said she also wouldn't have wanted that to be any different.

"Santa Clarita's been very kind to us and that's why we're very kind to Santa Clarita," Burke said. ■



■ Gene Burke and his truck when he started the business 60 years ago. Courtesy photo.

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