

Self-employed enjoy being their own boss

Money, flexibility among reasons some decide to employ selves

BY TRACY DAVIS
News Staff Reporter

This week marks Rebecca Arends' one-year anniversary of being self-employed.

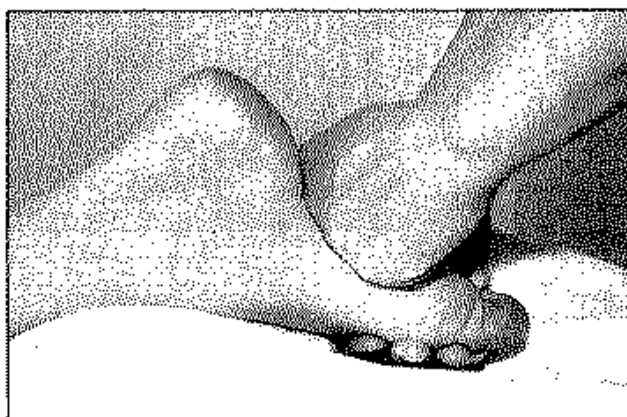
A massage therapist who runs her own business on West Stadium Boulevard in Ann Arbor, she took the leap last September and set up shop.

She's one of 8,772 Washtenaw County residents of working age, which means 16 and older, who are self-employed, according to 2000 Census data. That's 5.1 percent of all Washtenaw residents 16 and over. In Livingston County, 5.4 percent of working-age people were self-employed.

Arends joins coffee shop owners, therapists, writers, designers, builders, consultants and artists, among many other professions, in being self-employed.

It hasn't been an easy year for her at Excelsior Massage Therapy. But she said she has learned a lot and enjoyed the benefits and difficulties of having her own business.

"It's extremely easy to start a business, but the odds are against you to maintain it. Even breaking even is an incredible feeling of accomplishment," said Arends. "But one of the obvious blessings is just knowing you are taking that risk and you'll be able to say for once in your life you're your own boss and you get



to call your own shots."

Ann Arbor resident Eileen Wilkinson first launched herself as a free-lance technical writer in Rochester, N.Y., after her old job wasn't satisfying any more. After she and her husband moved back to Ann Arbor in the mid-1980s, she took a deep breath and tried to re-establish herself.

Her first contract came over the backyard fence from a neighbor. And with that, Eileen Wilkinson Technical Writing was launched.

Wilkinson works from home and hired her first permanent employee in 1993. Still, she occasionally worries when contracts near their end and no more work is in sight.

But she says it's worth it to fly on her own,

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Some keep their day jobs

even if it means she often works weekends and until 7 p.m. on weekdays.

"I really wanted to see if I could do it," she said. "And I wanted to do stuff that matched the quality of work that I wanted to do."

Her advice to others considering starting their own business?

"She can work her 15 hours a day any time of the day she wants," she said.

The percentage of people self-employed in metro Ann Arbor is lower than the national number. Nationwide, 7 percent of working-age residents were self-employed in non-incorporated businesses, according to Census 2000.

The difference could be explained by the major employment centers in metro Ann Arbor, including Pfizer and the University of Michigan. Statewide, counties more reliant on the tourism industry, such as Grand Traverse, have higher numbers of self-employed. In Grand Traverse, on Michigan's west coast and home to society. I think that calling can be a pretty strong force."

Some keep the so-called day job while they try to launch their own business. According to the Census Bureau, many Americans — 6 percent — work two jobs nowadays, mostly out of necessity.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, those most likely to hold two jobs work in the service industry or in public service or administrative — such as teachers, nurses and police officers. And according to the Labor Department, most hold two or more jobs to meet expenses or pay debt, although some were saving for a major purchase.

Others are keeping that cash flow while starting their own dream career, notes Fuscaldo.

"They also want to have that security for a little while," she said. "It can also fill certain needs, like benefits. And sometimes one job can't give (them) everything. Some can be for pleasure or the ability to give to the world in a different way."

Sue Bareis, 59, is one of the lucky ones. She loves her jobs — all three of them.

With her sister, she co-owns Silver Spoon Antiques and Silver Spoon Antiques II in Ypsilanti's Depot Town district. She also works as an administrative as-work more than 40 hours a week.

"I'd have to sit down and add them all up," she said with a laugh. "I think I'd scare myself."

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