

# HOME IS WHERE THE WORK IS

**T**hey're graphic artists, sales representatives, producers, directors, writers, consultants, bookkeepers, word processors and accountants. They're hard workers and people with vision. They're sometimes stubborn, reclusive and cynical about what Corporate America has to offer. They hate wearing suits.

## by Shelly Rondeau Heller

Who are they? Santa Cruz's own breed of work-at-home professionals — people who forgo the structure, rules and restrictions of a traditional office and set up shop at home. They are converts to a trend fueled by corporate downsizing, layoffs, job insecurity, dissatisfaction and advancing technology which makes work at home feasible and fashionable. They often relocate to Santa Cruz County in pursuit of their work-at-home dream.

Although there are many logistical aspects of home employment, such as time and financial management, self-marketing and tax planning, the most crucial issues are psychological. Once you have confronted fears of "Oh my God, can I do this?" and struggled with maintaining your vision without role models or outside encouragement, figuring out how to design your office or deciding whether to buy liability insurance is a piece of cake.

Hence, most Santa Cruz work-at-home professionals (WAHPs) have strong philosophical reasons for working at home. Sandra Kirkpatrick, who has run a real estate appraisal business out of her Aptos home for three years, once held a prestigious position in a major banking institution. "Although there were a lot of things I liked about the job, there

were a lot of things I didn't like and had no ability to change," she recalls. Discrimination against women managers and limitations on her income were two of the major obstacles. "I started thinking, do I want to spend the rest of my life like this? Well, no."

On Oct. 1, 1989, after much thought and planning, Kirkpatrick set up shop in her home. "I'm a single mother, so I was risking a lot. I had no one to back me up, no second income, so complete financial ruin was the risk. It was very scary."

Two weeks later, the earthquake devastated the real estate business, but even that did not break her resolve. "My beliefs are

that the universe is abundant and that there is always enough. What I've found has borne out my philosophy that if you do your home-

work, if you're not afraid to work, if you're good at what you do and if you believe that you're going to make it in spite of the fear and the risk, you'll be successful." Success for Kirkpatrick has meant an annual income nearly twice her salary at the bank, being home for her daughter after school and the chance to pursue work as a spiritual/philosophical quest.

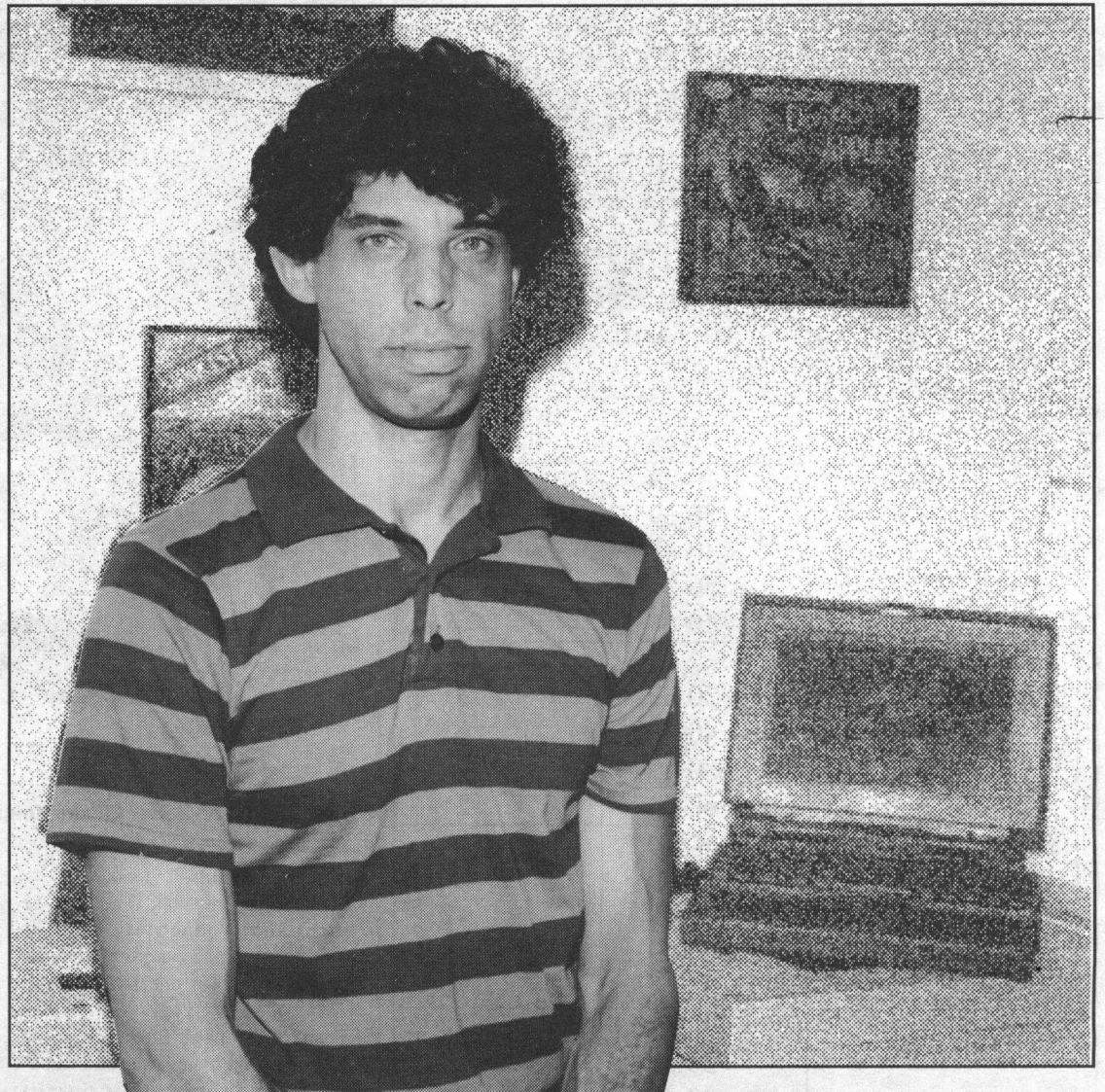
Artist Marilyn Churchill also did a stint in the corporate world as an illustrator, computer animator and manager of a computer animation department. She left her job in 1983, but after a divorce several years later, she needed income fast and didn't want to commute over the hill. She began to pick up computer illustration contracts to work on at home. "All the people I had hired were still in the business, so I had really good connections. It's a small world and really important to keep good business relationships," she says.

## Taking Care of BUSINESS

### Work At Home Group Forming

A new social group for all varieties of Work At Home Professionals is being formed by Sandra Kirkpatrick, owner of a successful home-based business. "Most people who work at home feel isolated at times," she says. "Our goal is to provide a place to go one evening a week where you can get away from the house and see people who are in a similar situation. It's a great stress reliever."

The next meeting takes place on Tuesday, October 6 at 5:00 p.m. outside of the Pacific Coffee Roasting Company, 7554 Soquel Dr., Aptos. Just show up for coffee, tea and conversation or call Kirkpatrick at 685-9239 for more information.



Jeff Samuels, who runs his computer graphics and consulting business from his Santa Cruz home, says much of his work comes through networking.

Like many others, Churchill finds that she is much more productive at home. "I'm a very disciplined person and have no problem putting time and energy into work," she explains, noting that she often spends 10-12 hours a day at the computer. "But I don't want to be on someone else's schedule."

Concurrent with her graphics work, Churchill has made it a high priority to develop herself as a fine artist. As a result, she is exhibiting her paintings in a Carmel gallery. "At first it was a mad rush to get clients and income-producing work, so my art took a back burner until this past year," she explains. "Now I'm trying to devote the same time and energy to my art while maintaining the other business as well. It's frantic, really difficult to do. I find I'm working all the time."

For Churchill and most other successful WAHPs, working at home is a balancing act. While it does allow certain freedoms and flexibility, most homeworkers are extremely driven by nature and risk working themselves into the ground.

Another WAHP who always seems to be working is Jeff Samuels, owner of the Santa Cruz-based Graphics Resource Network. "I'm not really a vacation-type of a guy," Samuels says, which is fortunate when you consider the type of service he offers — 24 hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week computer graphics and consulting.

Although the hours can be long, Samuels finds that his time is flexible and he can work personal things into

his schedule. "You don't really get rich doing this kind of thing, but the flexibility and quality of life make the difference," he says. "I consider it a labor of love."

After five years of doing business in Santa Cruz, Samuels says he doesn't have to go out and sell his services. "I'll do my marketing in my communications with others, he says, explaining that much of his

*'... if you're good at what you do and if you believe that you're going to make it in spite of the fear and the risk, you'll be successful..'*

work comes through networking with business associates and through word-of-mouth.

"When you work in Santa Cruz, you can't always expect to get top dollar for something," he observes. "At times you work with a sliding scale and help someone out. But, it works out. It ends up coming back to you one way or another."

Business agility — or the ability to adapt quickly to a changing marketplace — often helps a low-overhead home-based business survive where others would fail. "My operation is simple," Samuels acknowl-

edges. "I don't have employees, my expenses are low, so I can survive tough times."

Lean, cost-efficient operations are crucial to successful home-based businesses. Most WAHPs find ways to do without certain expenses, choosing longevity over frivolity.

Clearly, working at home is not for everyone. People who need structure, a "power" office, or outside direction might flounder at home. However, those who place a higher value on charting their own course, working at their own pace and having more control of their income and time, might be more comfortable working at home.

Colleen Sayre, a sales representative for Bay Area Shelving in San Jose, finds that she can be more creative working at her Aptos home three days a week. "In my last job as a sales rep, I was spending four hours a day in traffic," she recounts. "It was stupid. I may as well have had another part-time job."

Today, Sayre can't think of a single disadvantage to her work-at-home situation, although it does cause some resentment from her co-workers. "When I leave after one of my days at the office, people say, 'Oh, Colleen's going back to the beach,'" she recounts.

Beach or no beach, in the three years since her busy beginning, Sayre is still the top producer for the company. "I figure [the resentment] is a trade off. It's pretty small compared to having to work in an office all the

(Continued on page 12)



Investment - General      Mrs. Sandra Kirkpatrick      70

DAVID ALEXANDER



**Real estate appraiser Sandra Kirkpatrick has nearly doubled her salary since she began working at her home.**

*(Continued from page 11)*

time," she admits.

Besides financial, time management and productivity benefits, working at home can promote accelerated growth in one's chosen profession. Last year, writer Ron Franke left a job in the computer business to pursue his desire to be a novelist, writing at his Seacliff home. He has nearly completed one

novel and is at work on his second. "My writing has improved greatly, it's much more focused and professional," he says. "This year has been very successful psychologically for me. It proves I can do something I've always wanted to do."

The satisfaction derived from doing something that flies in the face of "conventional wisdom" can be intoxicating. That, and a unique

brand of faith forged from constantly taking risks is what keeps WAHPs going. Most believe that the path they are following is guided or inspired by some force outside of themselves. "Every now and then, it hits me that none of this is in my control," Kirkpatrick says of her successful real estate appraisal business. "It may look like I'm doing it all myself, but I'm not." •