

SOUTH JERSEY UNLIMITED: INDUSTRIES

Would-be entrepreneur found help through state

By **BILL DUHART**
Courier-Post Staff

WILLINGBORO

John Erving knew he had what it takes to be a salesman, but also knew he had a thing or two to learn about becoming an entrepreneur.

He had a vision: a greeting card company with messages for people like him, for African-Americans.

Seemed like a viable idea, he thought. But staying afloat until it became profitable was the tricky part.

He knew it would take hard work and determination. He later learned it also required additional training and start-up money.

He found both at the state Economic Development Authority. Now, seven years into his venture, Erving is finally turning a profit and joins a growing pool of successful minority businesses in South Jersey.

"I never really thought of failure to be an option," said Erving, 54, a township resident, who along with his wife, Margaret, formed JonMar Creations out of their home on Thornhill Lane. "The alternative was to go back to work for someone I didn't want to."

Erving had sold food-service supplies to restaurants and in-



SCOTT ANDERSON/Courier-Post

Margaret and John Erving of Willingboro with examples of their greeting cards aimed at the African-American market.

stitutions for Kraft Foods. Before Kraft, he worked for the American Greetings card company, a rival of Hallmark for the multibillion dollar greeting card business. While at Kraft, Erving spent the better part of 12 years on the road dealing directly with suppliers. A corporate shakeup parked him in a desk job. That's when Erving decided to go his own way.

"I consider myself more of a salesperson than an artist," Erving said, who also draws and designs many of the cards and writes the greetings. "Basically, I go out to pound the pavement and my wife is here to answer the phone and keep the business

afloat."

Erving beefed up his business smarts at the regional Small Business Development Center library at Rutgers-Camden. The center provides information and seminars in conjunction with the state EDA and the federal Small Business Administration.

His next stop was an eight-week Entrepreneurial Training Institute class from the state Development Authority for Small Business, part of the state EDA. After completing the training with an approved business plan, Erving then qualified for a \$30,000 EDA start-up loan.

EDA Executive Director Car-

More information

■ The New Jersey Economic Development Authority offers entrepreneurial training for small business start-ups. To find out more about the program, call (609) 292-9279 or visit www.njeda.com.

en Franzini believes entrepreneurial training is essential for small-business startups.

"It's a fantastic opportunity for someone who wants to start a business," Franzini said.

The training is held twice yearly in several locations around the state. The next session in South Jersey starts on March 10 at Burlington County College. The course cost \$295, plus \$300 in additional fees for materials and services. Pre-registration is required.

Franzini said about 55 percent, or about 700 applicants, have completed the training since it started in 1992.

For the right project, the

EDA can facilitate a loan of up to \$1.5 million.

Erving didn't need quite that much to get started, but still needed to do some belt tightening at first.

"We had some debts and did some refinancing," Erving said. "I had some savings from Kraft and from time to time I dipped into that. We're just starting to see some real income."

Margaret Erving kept her job as a federal quality inspector for defense contractors until March of last year. She has since joined the family business full-time. John Erving said the business grossed \$100,000 last year, a good chunk of which came from sales in selected Pathmark supermarkets and CVS drug stores.

"He brings a different variety and diversity of selection," said Rich Savner, the director of public relations for Pathmark.

Savner said JonMar cards are in 22 stores in New Jersey, Philadelphia and New York City.

Reach Bill Duhart at (856) 486-2576 or bduhart@courierpostonline.com

BUY
EARLY
& SAVE

Riverton
POOL & GARDEN CENTER

Sparkle Pool & Spa a division of Riverton

Schedule Your Free In-Home Appointment Today and Find Out

PRE-SEASON POOL PACKAGE PRICING

Seablue
SWIMMING POOL SYSTEMS

The
Graphex
Premium Pool System

We Deliver Quality & Service!

We have vinyl liner replacements in 24 different patterns with 15 year warranty, highest quality 20 gauge vinyl.

Call for Free Estimate



Belleek
FINE PARIAN CHINA

A PERFECT GIFT FOR ANY OCCASION...

SOMETHING FOR EVERY DECOR...

Belleek Parian China is known the world

