



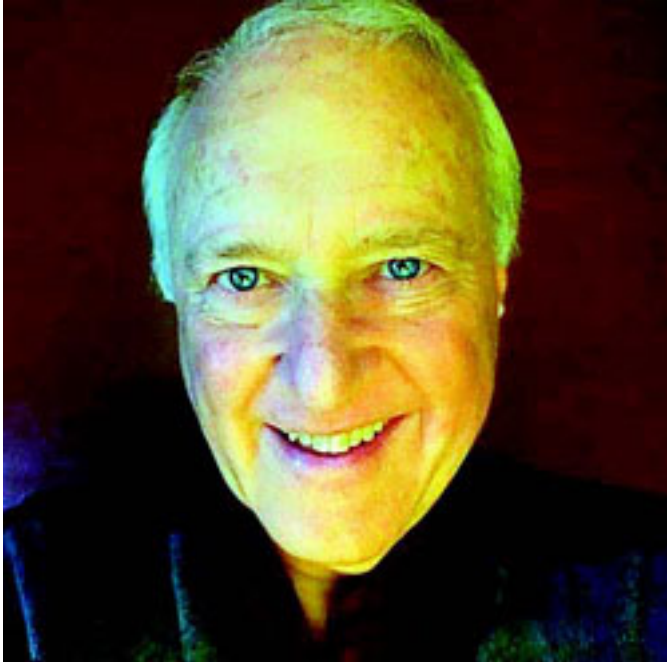
Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published December 30th. 2015

Local Volunteer Business Advisors Boast of One Client's Success

By *Sophie Braccini*



Larry Tessler Photos provided

When Ciara Stockeland, a young entrepreneur from Fargo, North Dakota, was invited in October to the White House to hear President Obama speak and to testify in front of the Senate on behalf of small businesses, Moraga resident Larry Tessler felt like a proud grandfather. Not that the 30-year veteran in corporate retailing has any family relationship with the young mother. But for the past 10 years, he and fellow Score advisor Jim Philpot have been advising Stockeland - starting when she and her husband, Jim, opened their first retail store, then when she developed it into a franchise. Score is a nonprofit organization staffed with high profile, mostly-retired business people who volunteer to offer their expertise to serve others.

In September, prior to her D.C. adventure, Stockeland also received the Score Franchise of the Year award. Tessler feels that Score can offer great service for free to businesses like the Stokelands' across the nation.

"She first approached me via email in December of 2005," said Tessler of Ciara Stockeland. "She was a young mother with two children. She had no success in finding stylish maternity wear in Fargo; she had to go to Minneapolis to buy her clothing. She wanted to open a maternity store, but she had no retail experience." Tessler mentored her along the way as her business evolved into an off-price fashion clothing business. As her business grew, she established herself as a franchisor. Then Jim Philpot, a Moraga resident as well as a Score colleague, came in and offered his franchising expertise. Mode, Stockeland's store, now has 12 units operating from North Dakota down to Kansas and over to North Carolina. "Jim and I continue to aid her when needed," adds Tessler.

In 2006, Stockeland opened her first retail store, Mama Mia, in Fargo. And in 2007, a company that had a lot of designer cloths overstocked that they needed to liquidate approached Jim Stockeland and Ciara decided to open a second store, Mode, next door to the original Mama Mia. "The consumers in Fargo really liked that outlet deal so in 2008 we decided to merge the two concepts, and bring the outlet into the boutique environment and created Mode as you see it today," Stockeland said in an interview for Score. Tessler says that what makes Stockeland successful is that she had a passion for what she does and the people she meets. Philpot explains her franchising achievement is due to the fact that she picked franchises that were in her image and stuck to the same game plan. "Ciara says that she will have 75 franchises in five years; I believe she can do it," adds Tessler.

The relationship that was set 10 years ago with the volunteer advisors continues today. Ciara Stockeland says that she can go back to Philpot and talk to him about digging into the unit level economics of each of her franchises, making sure that they can grow their businesses the same way they were able to grow the original Mode store. Today she advocates for the franchising model.

That is why she testified in front of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on Oct. 6, asking the committee to support legislation to reverse the National Labor Relations Board's decision to alter the "joint employer" standard for businesses, which will force the Stockelands to take more direct control over employees of the franchisees. This could make small businesses like theirs larger and jeopardize their ability to successfully operate as a franchise business.

For periodic business tips, go to the Score Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ScoreEastBay/>. Tessler, a Score mentor, can be reached at larryst39@comcast.net.



Jim Philpot

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA