

Wilderness Voyageurs

Ohionyle, PA

**Signs of
recovery:
Revenue was up
8 percent in
2010 over 2009,
thanks to
diversification**



Recession

In 40-plus years of providing outdoor adventures, Wilderness Voyageurs never had a better year than 2010. Growth had steadied – though never reversed – during the economic drought of 2008 and 2009. Eric Martin, owner of Wilderness Voyageurs, continued his steady diversification of the oldest rafting outfitter in the east, and deepened relationships with past customers. “People were going to be conservative with their dollars, and having previous experience with us, they would be more likely to entrust us with their time and money,” says Mr. Martin.

Reaction

Under Mr. Martin, a business that started with white water rafting has steadily diversified. It still offers \$25-per-person raft rentals on the Youghiogheny, but now arranges trips on 15 rivers in three states. It also sets up fishing, kayaking and biking excursions, including the Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C. ride; a Civil War battlefields tour; and a new Chesapeake Bay jaunt. “This gives us a lot of real estate to cover in the market, if folks are 'trading down' from their previous leisure activity,” said Mr. Martin.

Rebound

Those strategies paid off in 2010. Revenue growth, which had been hovering around 4 percent a year, surged to 8 percent. “Our bike tours have been a big player in that,” Mr. Martin said. “We were pretty ecstatic.”

Reinvestment

As customers' leisure ambitions grow again, Wilderness Voyageurs is poised to grow with them. This year, Wilderness Voyageurs is continuing to diversify by rolling out the Chesapeake trip, a multi-day rafting and flyfishing trip to Idaho, and a new store in Friendsville, Md.

Progress

Years ago, The Progress Fund loaned Wilderness Voyageurs \$50,000 to convert a historic bank building into a retail and rental shop and to buy a van and rafts. Since then, The Progress Fund has loaned \$331,000 to two other businesses launched by Mr. Martin – the Falls City Pub and the Trillium Lodge – and helped to refinance debt on another business line.