



# MEMBERS OF THE MONTH

By John Dunlap for the



## **Being the Best Is the Quest for Penn Valley Mini-Storage Co-Managers**

Mike Mastrodonato and Pam Bivens like challenges. They also like making a difference. It would certainly be easy to say that three years after taking over as managers of the Penn Valley Mini-Storage in Penn Valley, CA, they accomplished a major feat by upping occupancy of the facility from 80% to nearly 99%. But being the best is an ongoing quest and their take on being self storage managers could serve as the perfect "How To" for any facility manager intent on succeeding.

How often have you ever heard a boss sing these kinds of praises for his co-managers?

"They have been instrumental in improving the storage in every way including appearance, community involvement, and profitability," says Andy Bernadett, trustee of the Donald W Young Trust, which owns and operates Penn Valley Mini-Storage. "They have taken an underperforming business and turned it into community leader. They are both deeply involved in the community and are constantly volunteering for one activity or another. In three short years they have become leaders in the community and represent all the great values one would like to see in business partners and community members."

That testimonial, however, comes because Mike and Pam deeply love what they do. And when Bernadett speaks about their involvement with their local community, they consider it a major factor in their success. Mike is now the President of the Penn Valley Area Chamber of Commerce, serving his second term. Pam spends many hours volunteering at Chamber functions, as well.

Penn Valley Mini-Storage is very active throughout the year with community programs to benefit civic and charitable organizations. It holds a community Shred-Day event each year and donate all of the proceeds to the local Fire Department. During the holiday season the facility holds simultaneous food and clothing drives for the United Way and Food Bank. It also takes part in sponsoring many local events to benefit local organizations such as the schools, Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, local park, and more. Penn Valley Mini-Storage also runs an honor roll award program at its local elementary school and awards free ice cream certificates to all honor roll students each semester. And each year it awards two Donald W. Young Scholarships to local graduating high school students from Penn Valley.

"Being so involved and active in our community is not just something we enjoy, it is a pleasure and an honor," says Mike. "Our business is one of the leaders in the community and it is our duty to pay the community back."

Obviously, being a pillar in the local community by itself is hardly the reason why the occupancy rate at Penn Valley Mini-Storage has grown so impressively. When Mike and Pam arrived from Reno, Nevada, three years ago (Mike owned a window covering business that was severely affected when the housing market collapsed in 2008 and he and Pam then became involved with a self storage business in Fallon, NV) they already had an idea of the various things they needed to do to turn Penn Valley into a successful facility.

"Our basic philosophy is: 'Making friends is our business,' and that part comes naturally," says Mike. "We treat our customers the way we like to be treated."

"Next we looked at curb appeal, signage, and lighting, and made the necessary changes to make the property more inviting and appealing. It's amazing what a couple hundred dollars worth of flowers planted around the property can do for business."

Mike and Pam then brought in merchandise like locks, boxes, tape and moving supplies to draw more people into their business. They also became the only U-Haul dealer in Penn Valley. Finally, they developed the company's presence on the Internet with social media and their own website, which has the ability to take reservations, rent payments, and more through the site.

They also are big fans of the California Self Storage Association.

"Tools are a valuable part of success," Mike adds. "The CSSA is a fantastic tool for us. We can only keep growing and improving by learning and CSSA keeps us current and informed on what is happening in our industry. We visit the CSSA website regularly. We use the CSSA rental agreement. And one of the most used and important services our membership provides is the use of the legal network. Our questions are always answered promptly and professionally."

But the cost of being the best comes with an appreciation that it has to be ongoing.

"We feel that as managers of the facility, we have to be the best so that the facility can be the best," Mike concludes. "It takes a lot of devotion, passion, and hard work to be the best. It takes even harder work to remain the best. You must always remember that the higher you climb the harder you fall."

"You must always look forward, not back. Yesterday's successes are not guaranteed for today. Just look at all of your accomplishments and be proud, then look at ways to do it even better. But in the end, it all starts with one thing... Exceptional customer service!"