

Financial outsourcing company Bookminders comes east

BY JENNIFER CURRY
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Bookminders Inc. is opening its first office outside of Pittsburgh, with the launch of a Philadelphia-area location next month.

The company, which provides outsourced accounting and information management services to mostly small businesses and nonprofits, plans to open an office in Wayne early next month.

"We are here because of the proximity to Pittsburgh," said Terry Michael, who will be the branch manager for the Philadelphia market. "It's an easy market to get to, and it's a good jumping-off place for getting into other East Coast markets."

Although it's the company's first expansion, Bookminders President and CEO Thomas Joseph hopes it won't be the last. Joseph plans to use Philadelphia as a base that will enable the company to expand along the I-95 corridor with five offices opening over the next seven years in cities such as Washington and Baltimore.

"Something we've been working on for years is to position the company to grow into other markets," Joseph said. "Our operation in Pittsburgh is very stable."

The company recently implemented a new Web-based system that allows clients and Bookminders employees to check bookkeeping numbers on the Web at any time. With Bookminders employees able

to access the information over the Web, the company can now expand and continue to manage the workflow from its Pittsburgh headquarters, Joseph said.

Although Bookminders does not yet have any Philadelphia-area clients, Michael is working to hire about six employees. He hopes to grow the office to about 30 employees within the next three years.

Bookminders employs about 50 in Pittsburgh. Its unique strategy is to hire local people, primarily women who are raising children, who work from home, but are still able to meet in-person with clients when necessary.

"It's unique in that they are the connection between folks looking for, in large measure, part-time work from home," said Mark Masterson, interim executive director of Northside Community Development Fund, which provides financial assistance to Pittsburgh companies. The Northside Community Development Fund has helped fund Bookminders, including a \$125,000 loan for the company to set up its Web-based system, and is also a client.

Joseph raised an unspecified amount of capital from private investors to open the new office. Within two years, Joseph hopes to be landing 60 to 70 new Philadelphia-area clients a year, based on the number of new clients it has landed in Pittsburgh each year since its founding. He hopes the Philadelphia office will help double Bookminders' business within five years.



MIKE MERGEN

Terry Michael, branch manager of Bookminders' new location that is being constructed in Wayne.

"[If] we can replicate our success, we will very quickly be able to raise additional capital to go into other markets," he said.

Masterson added that the company's expansion to Philadelphia is a good sign the company is doing well.

"It helps with their base here in Pittsburgh," he said. "It's an indication that the company is healthy and able to expand."

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