



Bookminders: Northside tech innovators

In the early '90s, Tom Joseph was working with his father, trying to help him out with his business's bookkeeping, when he had what he calls his "aha!" moment. "I was just trying to help my dad out with some accounting and data entry," he said. "And at the same time, some of my sisters were looking for work, trying to find something that fit their schedules."

"That's when I got the idea – just trying to solve this bookkeeping problem for my dad. I thought there must be a lot of people out there who want to work from home primarily, but have the expertise to handle tasks like small business accounting – and you can do it mostly remotely and at the same time take that burden off of small business owners."

In 1994, Joseph would make the idea a reality, founding Bookminders, an automated accounting and information management firm designed to allow small businesses and nonprofits to outsource the otherwise burdensome and expensive tasks of internal bookkeeping. And he did it right here on the Northside.

"The Northside was the ideal place. I have a lot of people who do most of their work from home, but need to be able to get to the office easily from all over Pittsburgh, and being here makes that easy – it's a very central location. Very accessible."

Joseph started the company in Riverside Commons, which is now known as the Riverside Center for Innovation. "We were one of the first companies in there. A friend of mine had actually checked out the space earlier and told me about it. It was new at the time and I really liked the idea of there being a lot of small businesses all headquartered in one central location."

Today, Bookminders is a flourishing company with clients across a wide variety of industries, from nonprofit to medicine, law, retail and consulting firms. But to grow a small business requires investment, which is why last year

Joseph turned to the Northside Community Development Fund. The NSCDF provided Bookminders with a low-interest loan and a Technology Seeding grant, giving Joseph the capital he needed to expand his rapidly growing business and upgrade its infrastructure.

"That's what those Technology Seeding grants are designed to provide," said NSCDF Executive Director Mark Masterson. "You've got a company that can take that grant money and put it toward improving the business and creating jobs locally. What's great is that now, because of that success and the ability to make that kind of investment, you have a Northside-based business that's invested in the community doing really well, and you've got a few more folks working there."



In October of 2006, the company opened new offices in Philadelphia, where they have a whole new market at their fingertips. But even though the company had outgrown its original home at RCI and has expanded into other cities, Joseph was committed to staying headquartered in the Northside.

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"We knew we had to move. We'd been here more than a decade and had been expanding, and we needed a bigger footprint and a bigger workspace," he said. "By that point, there was a personal connection to the Northside, knowing the people in the community and liking it here."

Joseph found the newly developed Northern Light Tower on Western Avenue perfect for Bookminders' new home. "Northern Light Tower was another exciting new place, and we really liked the feel of high-tech design in a historic building."

"There's a lot of positive activity going on right now on the Northside, and it's great to be a part of that," he said. "I think this is going to be a better and better place to be, and I'm really excited about that. I don't have plans to go anywhere else – I really like this community."