

UP FRONT

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Mover Looks To Feast With Grocery

Buddytruk hooks up with Whole Foods to deliver more business.

Buddytruk, a startup on-demand moving service, turned to Whole Foods earlier this month to help it branch out.

The Santa Monica app maker, an Uber-like service that launched in August to offer Angelenos a way to find a "buddy with a truck" to help them move, partnered with Whole Foods to offer free deliveries for Christmas trees purchased at two of the grocer's Westside spots.

"I knew Whole Foods was looking to deliver its trees and we wanted to do something for the holiday season," said founder and Chief Executive Brian Foley, whose office is a block from the grocer's Wilshire Boulevard store in Santa Monica.

Buddytruk ended up transporting about 30 of the 300 trees sold at the chain's Santa Monica and Venice locations. Same-day tree deliveries took place within 50 miles of the two locations. It was Buddytruk's first business partnership with a company of this size, and with the Christmas trees sold out (Whole Foods will not be



Handy App: Buddytruk's Brian Foley at a Whole Foods store in Santa Monica.

restocking) the deal has been expanded to include picking up large toys next week at Whole Foods stores and then delivering them to children at UCLA Medical Center.

In addition to doing some good, the service offers the fledgling Buddytruk a way to make itself known. So far, there have been just 2,000 downloads of the mobile app.

The 25 drivers signed up for the service have helped 200 people move since

launch. Moving rates depend on distance and time, with an hourlong move running between \$40 and \$60. Similar to Uber, Buddytruk takes 20 percent off each transaction while its drivers keep 80 percent.

Despite a modest launch, Foley remains confident that the business is evergreen, saying Buddytruk had more deliveries the first week of December, including the tree business, than it did all of last month.

And new opportunities are expected to come with the new year. Buddytruk wants to upshift its business and hook up with more partners that require oversized deliveries. Foley said that he can see his startup grow to take on multiple stores' daily shipment needs.

"Other deliveries take three to five business days," Foley said. "We can get it there within the hour."

—Melissah Yang

Have Child, Will Travel

Being a new dad to a crying baby can be tough. But Erik Evens and his wife, Robin Lee, found a way to cope when their daughter was born six years ago.

"It was really hard for us to get alone time," Evens, 55, said. "In desperation, we decided that we would gift each other 'Voyages of Solitude.'"

His wife went on a four-day spa retreat in Palm Springs.

Evens, an avid sailor, quickly opted to set sail for Catalina Island

on his 25-foot Yankee Dolphin boat named after his wife.

"I had four days of blissful serenity," said Evens, of Evens Architects in Marina del Rey, who spent his time kayaking, reading and enjoying the scenery.

The solo voyages have become a recurring trip for the couple.

"We certainly enjoy vacationing as a family, but sometimes you need a little alone time and it's become something that's kind of nice for us."

potential for revitalization. And as a longtime member of the Urban Land Institute, he has

traveled the country — from Chicago to Philadelphia to West Palm Beach, Fla. — serving on advisory panels to help cities

and developers solve real estate problems in areas with poverty and blight.

Banner, 60, was recently given the opportunity to use his expertise overseas. Funded by the World

Bank, last week he hopped a flight with a team of real estate and land-use experts to South Africa. There, he will spend three days in Buffalo City on the Eastern Cape advising officials on local development issues. In January, he will return to South Africa to do the same for five days in Durban.

"My sense is if they're asking me to come, there are some issues of regeneration, poverty and how to connect communities together that need to be solved," he said.

"It'll be interesting to me to see what the similarities are in international issues versus domestic issues."



Evens

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CHARLES CRUMPLEY

Underserved Overseas

Michael Banner has spent most of his career — and his free time — working on behalf of underserved communities. As chief executive of non-profit community development bank Los

Angeles LDC, he provides capital for real estate projects in low-income urban neighborhoods that show



Banner

Staff reporters Subrina Hudson and Bethany Firnhaber contributed to this column. Page 3 is compiled by Editor Charles Crumpley. He can be reached at ccrumpley@labusinessjournal.com.

China Firm Plans To Light Up L.A.

Igoo hopes opening 'smartlamp' shop proves bright idea.

Cutting-edge design is not something that leaps to mind when discussing Chinese retailers; they're better known for manufacturing trailblazing ideas cooked up elsewhere (see: iPhone). But one Chinese company is looking to change that perception.

Igoo, a lighting company, opened its U.S. flagship store



Curvy: Igoo LED lamp.

in the Beverly Center at the beginning of this month.

The company's sole product is a pricey, curvaceous "smartlamp," which is pre-programmed with lighting and audio settings that can be customized to accommodate a variety of moods,

from sleeping to dining to romance (the company website uses a less euphemistic word).

Controlled through a Bluetooth-enabled handset, the dimmable smartlamp contains 64 LED lights and is designed to illuminate a 600-square-foot room.

The lamp's designers researched ancient artifacts and visited museums to create the contoured shape, designed after an ancient Chinese instrument.

"They wanted to come up with a shape that is very simple but elegant," said Alan Jahanshahi, manager of the

L.A. store.

It appears to have found resonance here. The store, which opened Dec. 1, had sold all of the 26 lamps it had on hand by the next day. There is now a 30-day waiting list for the \$799, hand-painted lights.

"We haven't done any advertising whatsoever, we just opened the doors and it's been great," said Jahanshahi.

"People walk past the store and they're a little confused, it's like seeing a car for the first time — they are wowed and think it's amazing," he said.

—Emily Hertlein