

Drum Beat Lessons

Company offers corporate training of a different sort



By SANFORD NOWLIN
EXPRESS-NEWS BUSINESS WRITER

It's a not-so-quiet morning at the Westin Riverwalk hotel as a group of 130 FedEx employees files into one of its ballrooms.

The floor shakes as nine musicians in intricately decorated dashikis pound out an infectious rhythm on an array of African djembe hand drums.

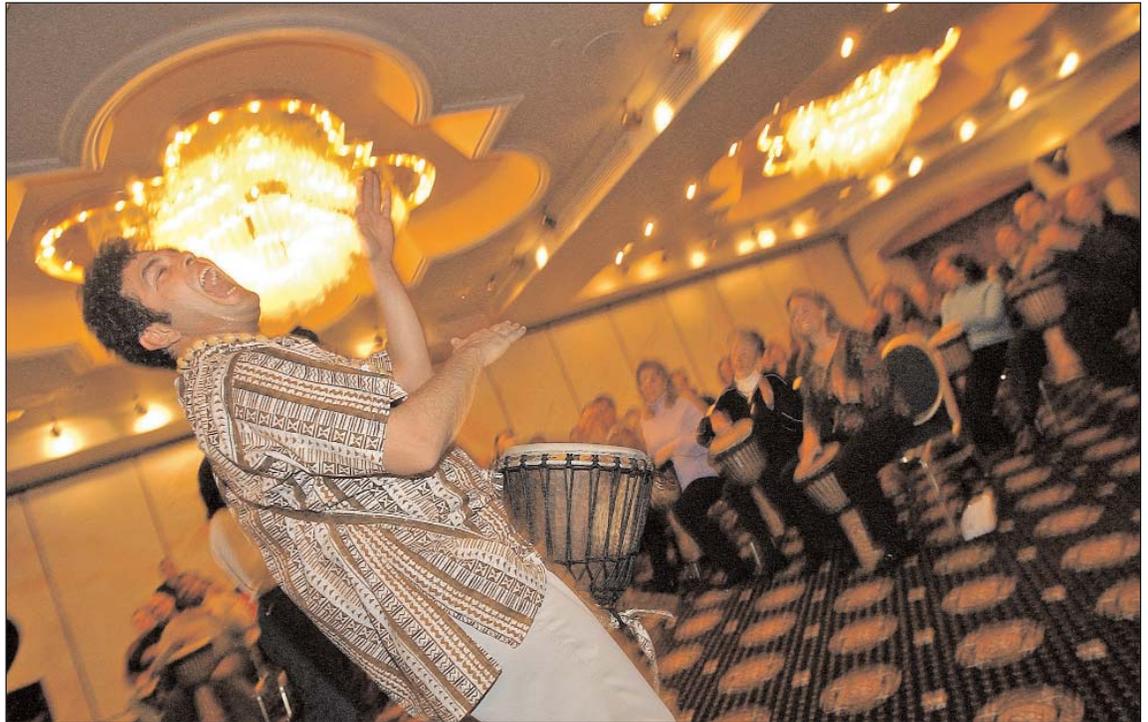
A few of the FedEx workers — visiting San Antonio for a sales conference — tentatively try to replicate the beats on African djembe hand drums resting on each of their chairs.

Others, still clutching their morning cups of coffee, simply look confused as they move the carved wooden drums aside and take their seats.

Eventually, one of the percussionists runs to the front of the room and like a hybrid of Tony Robbins and Tito Puente leads the group through a series of drum exercises that are as much about building corporate teamwork as they are keeping time.

"We're going to learn a little bit about listening today," says Michael Enderle, the man working the crowd, as he slaps the djembe slung over his shoulder. "We're going to learn how to share space and how to create space."

Within 75 minutes of the program's start, FedEx staffers are enthusiastically thumping along with the drummers at the front of the



PHOTOS BY KIN MAN HUI/STAFF

The Drum Cafe's Michael Enderle leads a group of Federal Express employees in the beating of African djembe hand drums. The Drum Cafe specializes in working with companies to enhance diversity and team-building through the use of rhythm and music. It's an affiliate of a South African company of the same name.

room and dancing in a circle as Enderle urges them to apply the lessons they learned to their daily work.

As Enderle brings the session to a close, they give his group a standing ovation. Several come to the front of the room to plunk down \$125 to buy the drums they played.

Drum Cafe, the company owned by Enderle and business partner Dale Monnin, has been staging such events around San Antonio for about a year. It's among a growing number of groups worldwide



The FedEx drummers go at it. Drum Cafe, a company owned by Michael Enderle and business partner Dale Monnin, has been staging events around San Antonio for about a year.

SEE PAGE 2

Trainers get conference-goers in step with a different drummer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

that use drumming to bolster corporate training, relieve stress and promote health.

"You can explain a concept to someone or have them read about it, and that's one thing," said Enderle, who spent 20 years in human resources at companies like Sony and Clarke-American. "But when the person actually experiences that 'boom!' — the unity of everyone hitting the beat on the one — they get it. They really understand."

Enderle and Monnin have used Drum Cafe events to help companies teach lessons in diversity, team-building and leadership. Just a year old, the company is working 15 to 20 engagements a month.

And in a sign that drum circles aren't just for the dreadlocks-and-patchouli crowd anymore, its clients include SBC Communications Inc., Motorola and World Savings & Loan, in addition to local hospitals and schools.

Enderle and Monnin meet with clients before staging their drumming events to find out what training messages they want to incorporate. They then tailor their program to fit the client's objectives.

A session aimed at improving leadership skills might allow group members to take turns directing beats and tempos, for example. One aimed at diversity might focus on the unifying power of making music together.

About half of its corporate customers are from outside San Antonio and retain the company to work conventions, meetings and training sessions here.

"Being in San Antonio, we realized the kind of convention and conference market there was here," said Monnin, who holds an international business MBA. "It turned out to be a good advantage for us."

Drum Cafe operates as an affiliate of a South African company of the same name. Its parent has been using drumming as a teaching tool for seven years, conducting events in 16 countries.

Monnin caught the drumming bug when he was working for a software firm in South Africa in the late '90s. It was there that he met Drum Cafe founder Warren Lieberman and began working with African percussion instruments.

"It was a powerful experience," Monnin said. "I got all sorts of ideas



Federal Express employees appear to enjoy banging away on their drums during the Drum Cafe event. Afterward, several of the participants paid \$125 to buy the drums they played. Drum Cafe is one of several firms that uses drumming to bolster corporate training, relieve stress and promote health.

about taking it with me when I left."

He and Enderle met in 2000 at a Dallas percussion workshop and discovered they both were interested in combining drumming with corporate training. Both were living in San Antonio at the time, and joining their business interests made sense.

So far, South Texas seems to be taking to the company's South African concept.

Jim Dreher, World Savings' national training director, has hired Drum Cafe twice since November to help conduct training exercises at the company's West San Antonio corporate campus. It's got two more sessions in the pipeline.

"At first (their program) is a little intimidating for our employees because we're bankers and we tend to be a bit stodgy," he said. "Then they start getting into it and realize, 'hey, this is kind of fun.' Afterwards, they're talking about it and laughing, and if they're doing that, you know you had a hit."

The University of Texas at San Antonio hired Drum Cafe in December to provide teamwork and motivational training for 60 of its academic advisers.

"We got a whole lot accomplished in a very fun way," Linda Chalmers, executive director of the university's adviser program, said. "People told me it really helped them understand our mission better. They felt like they were energized by

the experience."

Enderle and Monnin wouldn't say how much they charge clients for their programs, but people who have used the service said it can run several hundred dollars to several thousand, depending on how large and how long a session is.

"I say that we're more expensive than mariachis and less expensive than George Strait," Enderle said.

While Monnin and Enderle expect to quadruple Drum Cafe's sales this year over 2003, it wasn't easy at first to — ahem — drum up clients.

That began to change after they held meetings with the San Antonio Convention and Visitors' Bureau, local resorts and meeting planners to make them aware of what they could offer companies holding conventions and meetings here.

Rather than sitting across the table and passing out business cards at those meetings, the two brought drums and gave a hands-on demonstration of their services.

"When we come in and show a disparate group of people how they can come together through the power of music, it's very effective," Monnin said. "If they see it works with their small group, they'll understand that it can work for that larger group of people they may be bringing to town."