

Signal to Noise

## In the eye of storms

Premium content from Washington Business Journal by Robert J. Terry, Managing Editor  
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The Supreme Court ruling on President Barack Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act came down June 28. Immediate analysis and scrutiny commenced, and continues as you read this, but that day Josh Carin was doing what small business owners do — meeting with customers, overseeing day-to-day operations, thinking strategically.

The CEO of Riverdale-based Geppetto Catering Inc. wasn't sure of the implications of the ruling, which essentially upheld Obama's sweeping 2010 overhaul of the U.S. health care system and guarantees coverage to an estimated 30 million Americans. Like many small business owners, he's still not certain of what it will ultimately mean for his 35-employee company.

A more immediate concern swept through the region the next night, when a line of powerful storms toppled trees and left 1.2 million people without power in 100-degree heat. Geppetto Catering, which serves mostly corporate clients — including the Washington Business Journal and many other local media organizations — found its three walk-in refrigerators without power.

Until its generator kicked in — purchased after Snowmageddon in February 2010 — and powered operations for the next two days.

A storm is something Carin could plan and budget for. The Affordable Care Act, while accomplishing much that business owners support, especially in terms of coverage, still doesn't adequately tackle health care's rising costs.

A growing population in need of treatment for severe illnesses will continue to drive up demand for increasingly expensive care. Those costs are going to cripple many businesses in the years to come unless something is done.

That's why the industry's own cost-control reforms are so important to watch, fueled by the demand started by employers and insurers to stop rewarding doctors and hospitals for volume and start rewarding them for quality.

As Carin said: "If at some point I was in a position of keeping the company afloat and making really tough decisions, [mandated health coverage] is something that could impact my ability to keep the company afloat."

That storm could linger long after the lights come back on.

Manages day-to-day process of putting out paper; handles public relations queries

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