

Business Dreams Come True with the WBDC

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By Ronnie Ann Ryan

If you dream of owning a business but don't know where to start, or have a business but aren't sure how to generate growth, now you can put those worries aside. Introducing the Women's Business Development Center (WBDC). This local non-profit organization offers entrepreneurial training, professional development, workshops, and coaching to help people launch and expand companies, as well as consider career opportunities.

Their flagship program is the Fastrac seminar series which offers eight sessions for packed with everything business owners need to know such as writing a business plan, financing, marketing, and more. Fastrac #1 focuses on start up information, while Fastrac #2 is designed to help business owners increase revenue. The faculty are professionals and experts who donate their time as a way of giving back to the community. Programs are delivered at Gateway and Norwalk Community Colleges and the fee is \$150 for each eight-session series.

"Graduates" of the program can't say enough good things. Kathleen Donovan, owner of Phoenix Interiors learned everything she needed to take her part-time business to full time status. She's also thrilled with the continued access to WBDC staff. "[They] are very good with suggestions and the organization is great for support and contacts." Located at 58 River Street, her company offers interior sewing for the home, office or boat.

When people embark on the journey to start a new business, the amount of information required is extensive. From rental agreements for office or retail space, to taxes, and pricing, there is so much to understand and decide. Plus, once those items have been figured out, owners still have to create a plan to bring the business in. That's what makes the WBDC such a fantastic resource, because they have all that knowledge available and more.

One satisfied client, Kristina Foreman explains the outstanding advantage of working with the WBDC, "Why recreate the wheel? Instead you can get good advice from top professionals for a very reasonable fee. If you follow their advice, you're bound to succeed."

Originally, Kristina who worked as a makeup artist serving the bridal market with her a home-based business. Recently, she took the Fastrac program to discover how to shift her company to a retail shop. Her new store Makeupmakeup, located in Harbor Walk on the green, opens at the end of October and offers makeovers and custom makeup, as well as continuing to provide bridal services. Visit www.makeupmakeup.com to learn more.

According to Joe Hebert of Hebert Jewelers at 14 Broad Street, the WBDC even has workshops for experienced business people. He just completed the Hands on Finance for Established Businesses program which focused on reading and interpreting financial statements. Joe was very impressed with the instructor, her knowledge and the way the seminar was conducted. Plus he learned a lot from listening to the other business owners and felt better knowing he wasn't alone in needing more information in this area.

Joe encourages everyone who wants to learn more about business to take advantage of what's available at the WBDC and wants to reassure the men, "Guys, don't feel inhibited." He and his wife Louise made the transition from corporate to small business owners just three years ago. They purchased Hebert's Jewelers from a relative and are proud to report that sales have doubled since taking over in May 2003.

In addition, the WBDC provides career counseling for women in transition. Some clients have been downsized from the corporate world and want to find a new career and others just want to explore options. Professional development services are available too.

The WBDC's big picture goal is to improve the economic vitality of the state through job creation at the small business level –currently the economy's fastest growing segment. Fran Pastore and Dorothy Bratchell, along with a handful of women started the group in Stamford, back in 1997. As they grew, they received support and grants from state government and local municipalities, expanding to Norwalk, Fairfield, Bridgeport and then last year the greater Milford area.

Fran says the WBDC has a lot of people to thank for their growth and move into the greater Milford region. "We are deeply grateful to Gayle Slossberg, Jim Amann, Mayor Richetelli and the entire Milford delegation for supporting and sustaining the WBDC's ...greater Milford expansion."

Dorothy is excited about the WBDC's future plans, "We are getting ready to celebrate our 10th year and looking back we have achieved tremendous results." Currently, the Milford office, located at 58 River Street within the Milford Office Suites, is open by appointment. Give Fran or Dorothy a call at 203-353-1750 or visit the website www.ctwbdc.org soon to find out how to make your business dreams come true.