

THE EXPERTS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Development center celebrates 20 years

In early March, the General Assembly passed a joint resolution commending the Small Business Development Center of Hampton Roads for 20 years of support to entrepreneurs who marry the guts, faith and talent necessary to make dreams real.



JACK HORNBECK

Small business owners and entrepreneurs have a real friend in the SBDC, which provides them with management counseling, technical assistance and training. Most of this service is provided at no charge.

We're proud to help support this center with Thomas Nelson Community College, our partner in helping to found it. The center, which has counseled nearly 10,000 businesses over the years, is led by Executive Director Jim Carroll, also the chamber's vice presi-

dent for small business. We are certain of this center's value because we value small business.

Opening a business is a risk. Because we believe our local business community thrives when vision and risk meet best practices, we want small businesses to know they are not alone.

Neither are our neighbors.

A great success for the SBDC was its part in developing the first public-private partnership for business lending in the country. This effort aided many small businesses in Western Tidewater following Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Carroll calls that effort "one of our proudest undertakings."

And, following the announcement of International Paper shutting down in Franklin, the SBDC deployed to help again.

So we were deeply appreciative that the General Assembly recognized the milestone of this center via a bill introduced by state Del. John Cosgrove, R-Chesapeake.

That is not to say we were sur-

prised. We know this effort works because we hear from the businesses the SBDC helps. As a result of the SBDC's counseling, 2,900 jobs have been saved or created, and these businesses have generated more than \$208 million in economic impact locally.

The SBDC continues to support them even after small businesses are off the ground and running ahead, full steam.

Recently, the head of Arrieta Construction of Yorktown wrote to Debra Hamilton Farley, SBDC associate executive director, just to say thanks. Elaine Arrieta, the company's president, began her business in February 2009 with eight employees and \$250,000.

Arrieta wrote that she has benefited from several SBDC services and found ways to strengthen her business plan and track growth.

Workshops such as "Owning Your Own Business" not only helped, but introduced her to other services and resources.

"In addition to the great workshops the SBDC offers, the materials and contacts provided are priceless," she wrote.

As of this February, the business has 12 employees. Its 2009 revenues were nearly \$2 million.

"I strongly believe that our quick growth had a great deal to do

with taking advantage of the SBDC's great workshops and utilizing the resources and networking contacts provided," Arrieta wrote.

Make no mistake, the SBDC is a critical economic development program. Often as businesspeople and economy-watchers, we celebrate the big deal, the big company that shows up to bring big jobs.

Small businesses are where many of us work, shop and share in what makes a community great. Mom-and-pops are part of what gives a place character.

Entrepreneurs often know their community so well that their ground-level ideas grow into something monumental.

The employment, investment and new-employment data we monitor so closely often live and die with the health of small business. You can help by supporting the SBDC. Contributions through our foundation are tax-deductible.

With support, I can only imagine the businesses this center will help empower in its next 20 years.

For more information, call Jim at 664-2510 or e-mail jcarroll@hrccva.com.

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