

When small businesses score, the community wins



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As someone who grew up in a family business, working side by side with my parents and their employees, I know first-hand that small businesses are at the heart of the American economy. That experience helped me understand the difficulties that the small business person faces each day as they seek to innovate, survive, grow and, ultimately, thrive into a mature company.

According to recent study by the Small Business Administration (SBA), small businesses create most of the nation's net new jobs, contributing innovative services, ideas and products to our nation's economy. The U.S. Dept. of Commerce reports that small businesses represent about half of the U.S. private sector, with non-farm small business income having reached just shy of \$1 trillion in 2006. That's an increase of 5.5 percent from 2005.

Providing services and support for our small business community is workforce development in its purest form. Future job growth depends on support for America's entrepreneurs as they develop new businesses and nurture existing ones. Guidance in selecting a small business loan,

drafting a business plan, securing business mentoring and gaining access to best practices and affordable education are all core services that positively impact small businesses and, as a result, the local economy.

The challenges that small business entrepreneurs face are vast. No one local advocacy or government agency – no matter how strong it is – can meet all of the needs. And it is not enough for the services to be available within the community; they must also be known to the small business person. Communication is the key. How does a small business owner – working out of their home – find out about the resources that are available to them at the local and state levels? Think about the possibilities if we could create a single reference point for small businesses owners at the local level – somewhere a prospective or existing business owner can go to learn what type of assistance is available within their community and where and how they can start the process.

At Clark College, the local office of SCORE, the nonprofit association dedicated to the growth and success of small business

nationwide, is now located alongside our Corporate Education offices on Fort Vancouver Way. Our goal is to support small businesses by aligning SCORE's excellent counseling and mentoring services with our classes and training throughout Southwest Washington.

Though this is a small step, we hope that it is the beginning of more long-term collaborations. Connecting business owners to services that are already available could spur growth. That growth would come one job at a time, but the incremental results could be significant over the next five to ten years.

We need to remember that many corporations that are household words today began as small businesses incorporated in a garage. Investing in small business – and helping to secure job growth for the region's existing and future entrepreneurs – is the very essence of workforce development.

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