

Small Business Development Center opens doors for more than just small businesses

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at San Jacinto College, which is administered by the College's Continuing and Professional Development division, helps businesses to start new ventures, expand, boost productivity, and maximize profitability.

Although the word small appears in the organization's name, it is anything but.

According to Richard Prets, the San Jacinto College SBDC director, more people might make use of services provided by the SBDC were it not for a general misconception that he frequently encounters. "Many people think the Small Business Development Center only offers services to very small businesses, such as those that employ 50 people or less," he commented. "But we can provide valuable services to businesses with up to 500 employees. I like to tell people that we can help

small to mid-sized businesses. That's really a more accurate description of the SBDC."

For example, Prets recently helped the mid-sized company Shafaii's Party and Reception Center (PRC) through a key expansion phase. PRC launched 17 years ago with a few family members, and now employs approximately 100 people, including full-time and part-time staff. The SBDC at San Jacinto College helped PRC to secure a contract to serve as private event coordinator at Sylvan Beach Pavilion in La Porte, which reopened in late October. The pavilion had been closed since it was damaged

in Hurricane Ike. Launching the new venture at the Pavilion will create up to six new full-time and 40 part-time jobs for PRC.

On the other hand, the SBDC can also help just one person, or a few people transition from concept to marketplace. SBDC consultant Gary Bucek helped Dr. Chris Hymel to launch Signal Advance, a venture based on Hymel's unique Signal Advance Technology. Hymel's patented technology has the potential of significantly improving signal performances of devices and applications used in a wide range of medical and industrial fields.

The SBDC at San Jacinto College thrives on helping entrepreneurs like Hymel to develop effective business strategies. "At first, Dr. Hymel explained he was an engineer and jokingly said he could not even spell the words advertising and marketing," Bucek commented. "We reviewed and suggested revisions of all the Signal Advance correspondence, business plans, press releases, cash flow statements, etc. Signal Advance is an outstanding idea that can help many people. Our goal is to help take it from concept to market."

Hymel says working with the SBDC was a wise choice. "I had spent nearly three years trying to come up with business plans and marketing on my own, and was not really making much progress," he commented. "It's amazing how much progress we made after working with the SBDC for only a few months. We've gained so much exposure, and they have provided important critical review, and especially helped us in the areas of communication and networking."

The SBDC at San Jacinto College offers free, private advising to help entrepreneurs start new businesses. The SBDC also helps small to mid-sized businesses expand, boost productivity, and maximize profitability. Services include assistance with loan applications, writing business plans, creating marketing strategies, developing budgets, and much more. For information, please visit www.sjcd.sbdcnetwork.net or call 281-485-5214 extension 7. ■

Rob Vanya



Key players in a new venture stand inside the grand ballroom of the renovated Sylvan Beach Pavilion, including (from left) Richard Prets, director of San Jacinto College's Small Business Development Center; Armand, Raj, and Norma Shafaii. The Shafaii family's Party and Reception Center will serve as operator for private functions held at the pavilion. Photo credit: Rob Vanya, San Jacinto College marketing, public relations, and government affairs department.