

SUCCESS STORY

Portland District Office

Oregon Small Business Person of the Year

Tara O’Keeffe-Broadbent

O’Keeffe’s Company

O’Keeffe’s Story

The roots of O’Keeffe’s Company go back more than 25 years to an arid region on the California-Oregon border known as the Klamath Basin. Tara O’Keeffe’s father was a rancher and the tough lifestyle took its toll on Bill O’Keeffe’s hands and feet. The work and the weather had dried and cracked his skin to the point that he could hardly shake hands and it was painful to even walk. When O’Keeffe graduated from college with a degree in pharmacy from Oregon State University, Bill believed his daughter, with her new education, might be able to help him. Of course, he had already tried nearly every alleged dry skin treatment available, including the expensive prescription medications. Unfortunately, they had all proven ineffective; nothing seemed to heal his damaged skin. Tara began a long process of experimenting with various concoctions until, many years later; she had the basic formula for what became O’Keeffe’s Working Hands. Her persistence turned a kitchen-table project into a solution for her father’s dry skin. Eventually this family endeavor expanded into a booming business helping others with the same problems. O’Keeffe used knowledge gained from her pharmacy background and her natural gift for thinking outside the box to formulate what is now the signature product of O’Keeffe’s Company. Over the years, she discovered many secrets about healing skin, and has incorporated each of them into improving her formulation. Her focus is on actually healing skin and thus deviates from the conventional wisdom behind traditional lotions. The underlying difference is the oil - or the lack of it. Unlike most skin creams and lotions, O’Keeffe’s contains no oil. According to O’Keeffe, "oil repels moisture - it simply sits on the skin." Her product attracts moisture, draws it into the skin, and promotes the healing process. O’Keeffe’s is a family owned business incorporated in 1994. The company proudly carries on the tradition of family owned businesses that have always been the backbone of American communities. All members of Tara’s immediate family are involved in the business in one way or another.



In 2003, the Bank of the Cascades in Redmond, Oregon loaned O’Keeffe a \$150,000 SBA Express Line that was pivotal to the growth of her business by allowing for design and packaging. The complete transition to the new packaging took over a year and was made possible financially by the SBA backed loan to the company. Without SBA backing and willingness to support an entirely new, untested marketing plan, O’Keeffe would not have been

likely to obtain the necessary financing to proceed. The original mission was to provide superior relief for people who work with their hands. As a pharmacist, Tara soon recognized that many of these folks who suffer from dry, chapped skin don't regularly go into drug stores. In 2004--in conjunction with the change in packaging, and through the guidance of Central Oregon Community College's SBDC business advisor, Jim Wilcox—O'Keeffe set out to create a new category in the hardware/home improvement channels of distribution. Having grown up on a ranch, she also realized that farm & feed type stores would be another excellent channel to target. Thus two new markets for Working Hands were born. Then, with the encouragement of the American Diabetes Association and many Podiatric educators, O'Keeffe's developed and launched Healthy Feet crème in 2005. Tara's decision to expand the product line was an easy one. Her experience working in a pharmacy had shown her that there was a clear need for an effective over-the-counter foot therapy. Additionally, Tara was driven by memories of her diabetic father suffering from extremely painful cracks and splits in his feet that resulted in multiple surgeries and ultimately the amputation of both feet. This market is growing rapidly due to the epidemic growth of diabetes in America. Most recently, O'Keeffe's launched the Life Out There product for the outdoor/sporting goods market (REI, G.I. Joe's, Sportsman's Warehouse, Cabela's, etc.), changing its formulation to reflect "a lighter touch" needed for activities such as rafting and fishing, where the lack of oil minimizes slippage and allows for true on-the-go application. O'Keeffe's is an old fashioned success story in which science, dogged determination, desire to help others, and the love for a father came together in a product more effective than anything the giant cosmetic companies could conceive.

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