
Class helps Tri-City entrepreneurs

Tri-City Herald, March 30, 1997

Are you interested in starting a small business? Is your business idea marketable? Who is your target market? What do you know about managing cash flow? These are important questions for would-be entrepreneurs, and getting accurate answers could make or break your new business. Fortunately, help is available from Washington State University at Tri-Cities.

The university offers entrepreneurial training courses as part of the Entrepreneur Support Network, which provides a wide range of information and assistance to people interested in starting new businesses or expanding existing businesses. The network includes WSU Tri-Cities, the Tri-Cities Enterprise Association, the Benton-Franklin Regional Council, the Small Business Development Center and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's Economic Development Office programs. With leverage from other financial sources, this partnership increases the community's investment of the Department of Energy's 3161 funding, which is provided to help communities affected by federal government downsizing.

"A basic part of the entrepreneurial pipeline is education and training," said LoAnn Ayers, director of the WSU Tri-Cities business office. To meet this need, WSU Tri-Cities developed a two-part noncredit course called Entrepreneur Success Training. "Phase I explores the feasibility of a business idea and takes participants through a structured decision-making process about whether or not to proceed. Phase II assists participants to develop a competitive business strategy and a marketable business plan," Ayers said.

About 300 people have attended Entrepreneur Success Training in the past two years, and about 60 new businesses were started by participants.

"Preparing a business plan forces you to answer all the tough questions before you start your business," said David Ortiz, president of the newly formed R-O-M Therapeutic Equipment Inc. Ortiz completed both courses before creating the company.

Success Training graduate Joe Coenenberg launched Alchemy Brew and Wine in the Pasco Village Marketplace with his wife, Ella, and Stan and Susan Hill. They have been in business for a year, selling microbrewing supplies and upscale wines, and they already have expanded three times, adding wine tasting to their list of services.

"The class provided opportunities to get feedback from other businesses in the community, which was very helpful. It also helped us focus on the market potential for this business," Coenenberg said.

Another Entrepreneur Success Training alumnus, Stan Wanless, launched a construction management and project control business, Time and Cost

Management, and successfully bid on a contract for the 70,000-square-foot Consolidated Information Center facility on the WSU Tri-Cities campus.

During the training courses, the Tri-Cities Enterprise Association offers participants fully equipped, pre-incubator office space for up to 90 days to conduct start-up research and business plan development at their Office Resource Center. After the courses, the Entrepreneur Support Network partners can assist in finding funding from a variety of sources.

Registration forms are available at WSU Tri-Cities, 100 Sprout Road, Richland, 99352 (e-mail: buslinks@tricity.wsu.edu).

Along with its training for business start-ups, WSU Tri-Cities also provides short courses for existing business owners. These evening courses, which typically are three to six hours long, cover a wide range of topics from bookkeeping basics to creative marketing and cash flow management.