

# Business

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DRU NADLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fran Pastore, chief executive officer of Women's Business Development Council, in the organization's new headquarters on Bedford Street in Stamford. The WBDC has training sites in Darien, Fairfield, Norwalk and New Haven and a client base of about 15 percent men.

## Growing to serve small businesses

**Women's Business Development Council:** As Stamford-based group expands, bigger role seen for local entrepreneurs in recalibrated economy

By Michael C. Juliano  
Staff Writer

The Women's Business Development Council recently expanded its headquarters in response to a growing need to help women — and men — become entrepreneurs in a difficult economy.

The Stamford-based non-profit agency in 1997 started out of a small office on Main Street before moving in 2003 into a cramped 250-square-foot office in the Stamford Government Center. Despite the perk of free rent at the government center, the WBDC last month signed a three-year sublease for a 1,500-square-foot office space at 184 Bedford St.

"We needed a new home base to serve the clients that come to us," said Executive Director Fran Pastore, whose clientele has grown 20 percent annually since 2008 to about 1,200 patrons a year. "We were all in one room before so it was hard to hold conversations with clients."

The new venue provides separate offices for its four full-time employees and also has a conference room for meetings with patrons and staff members, Pastore said.

**The WBDC's expansion will ideally result in more unemployed people starting their own ventures, said Jack Condlin, president and chief executive officer of the Stamford Chamber of Commerce.**

"This gives us more of an ability to work as a team," she said.

Pastore said the WBDC, which receives local, state and federal funds and corporate and private donations, will still maintain its Shelton and Waterbury satellite offices, which were founded in 2007 with two

staff members each to address the needs of women from those areas.

"We did that because they were coming down to Stamford," she said, adding that the organization's name was changed a few months ago from "Center" to "Council" to reflect a statewide reach. "We really go where the demand is."

The WBDC, which has training sites in Darien, Fairfield, Norwalk and New Haven and a client base of about 15 percent men, is looking for participants in its new "budget coaching" program designed to help people manage their personal finances, Pastore said.

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"I think the future holds that small businesses will be even a bigger part of the economy than before," he said.