

SHELTON *Life*

COMMUNITY & BUSINESS NEWS

OCTOBER 2008
VOLUME 15, ISSUE 3

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BUSINESS NEWS

Business Center Marks First Year of Assistance to Area Entrepreneurs

The Women's Business Development Center has just completed its first—and very successful—year in Shelton, offering programs and services to business owners. It couldn't have come at a better time, with smaller businesses struggling to get by in the current economic downturn.

From its section of the Valley Chamber of Commerce office at 900 Bridgeport Ave., the WBDC provides one-on-one consulting for people who are seeking guidance on specific business issues, lunchtime teleclasses with experts discussing more wide-ranging topics, and seminars on smart business strategies.

The programs cover such topics as sales strategies, insurance basics, state licensing, and certification for woman-owned businesses. Often they are free of charge, as the WBDC is a non-profit group that receives grants from the U.S. Small Business Administration and other sources to carry out its purpose. It also offers a sliding scale for fees.

In coming weeks, the Shelton office will host several of these workshops and learning sessions. For example, on Tuesday, Oct. 28, there will be a "Lunch and Learn" teleclass on "Why Every Business Owner Should Plan for the Unexpected." That will begin with a networking session at 12:15 p.m., and the teleclass will follow at 1 p.m. Participants are encouraged to bring lunch; the WBDC will provide drinks and snacks. Admission is free.

Another October teleclass is "Access to Markets: Doing Business with the State of CT." It will take place from 12:30 to 2 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 15 and is free of charge.

Beginner entrepreneurs who need a web site but aren't Internet-savvy will be interested in another upcoming class: "Web Design Basics: Where to Start." That class will take place in the Shelton office Tuesday, Nov. 18. Cost is \$15 for WBDC members and \$20 for non-members.

One frequent participant in the WBDC's Shelton programs is Jill Holmes, owner of All About Art in Monroe. Holmes started her business four years ago when her youngest child started first grade. After several years of providing art classes in rented space, Holmes recently bought a building to house her business, which she expanded to include a gallery and gift shop. She also acquired materials and equipment from Claydate, a Monroe ceramics-painting business that closed earlier this year.

"The Women's Business Development Center has been invaluable to me as my business has been growing," Holmes said. "They worked with me on a business plan



Dorothy Bratchell of Shelton, left, who oversees the Shelton office of the Women's Business Development Center at 900 Bridgeport Ave., works with client Jill Holmes, owner of All About Art in Monroe. Holmes, who has had her own business for nearly five years and has attended numerous WBDC sessions, recently expanded her business after buying a building for that purpose in Monroe.

and marketing, and I've learned a lot of valuable information at the 'Lunch and Learn' sessions. I try never to miss one, and I would recommend them to anyone else who is trying to build a business."

Dorothy Bratchell, the WBDC's co-founder and chief operating officer, oversees the Shelton office. A Shelton resident, she formerly was a business owner, providing educational and technical consulting services to corporations and non-profit groups.

Recently, Bratchell said, she has been seeing more people who need assistance with résumés, "but still, most clients come seeking assistance in entrepreneurship. We continue to see very successful women in their 40s and 50s wanting to leave Corporate America and start their own businesses."

For the WBDC's second year in Shelton, Bratchell expects to serve an increasing number of business owners, both new and established. Since the WBDC started in Stamford 11 years ago, she said, it has grown considerably "because of the need for its services and its reputation for being the preferred service provider for entrepreneurial training. We anticipate the same to happen in Shelton."

For more information about WBDC programs, call 910-4663, visit ctwbdc.org, or e-mail info@ctwbdc.org. ♦