



MIKE MASTROIANNI  
SBDC

## Some local business success stories

### Gearing up for expanded services for small businesses

The SBDC assists small business start-ups, re-starts and growth companies through advising, business planning through the Growth Wheel (our business planning software program) and client preparation for access to capital, digital marketing, social media, website development and basic HR needs.

When the coronavirus shut down businesses, we helped with re-starts and access to capital, and provided contact information for assistance with state and federal funding programs. We provided infographics for reopening businesses and are attempting to get translations of webinars and other information into several languages, in cooperation with Jonathan Bell of the City of Rockford.

#### Growth and Business Launch

At times, we like to highlight our

business success stories and have three brief stories to share today. Many more can be accessed through YouTube.

John Randolph, owner of Cherry Valley Garden Center, specializes in annual bedding flowers, tomatoes, herbs and pepper plants, among other items for home gardeners. John worked with Edward Caceres from the SBDC to develop his business plan and to get financing. He was able to secure a loan from a local bank. Edward also helped John with his website and social media presence.

Brisa Berumen sought out help from the SBDC for financial advice. Her business, Seabreeze, provides non-emergency transportation services, and she was seeking funding for a second ambulance, which she did receive. Edward assisted her in working to get her loan approved. Today, she has three working units and is at full capacity.



*John Randolph, owner of Cherry Valley Garden Center, worked with the SBDC to develop his business plan and secure a loan from a local bank.*

Aktibo Athletics offers eco-friendly athletic wear for customers online, and Johann Hayag, Zach Kentner, Colin Carey and Riley Kentner worked with me to develop a business plan and get their launch ready, which occurred on Aug. 15. The SBDC helped build the plan, create connections and provide general advising from our experience owning and operating our own companies.

#### Serving a Very Diverse Clientele

Our clients are very diverse. This year, due to the COVID outbreak, our numbers have exceeded last year's numbers in only six months. We assisted more women-owned businesses than male-owned businesses and more Hispanic/Latino and Black/African-American businesses than

Caucasian-owned businesses. Although many of our clients are from Rockford, we also have clients in Boone, Stephenson, Ogle and parts of DeKalb counties, and some from outside our region.

We have applied for CARES Act temporary assistance from the SBA to help clients with budgeting and financing, digital marketing and Human Resources issues. Soon, we will have temporary advisors to assist us in our mission.

With our Launch 815 partnership, we also direct people to start their entrepreneurship journey with the Rockford Public Library. Business librarians can help with formulating an idea, getting clients to webinars and information sessions needed to learn about financing, planning, developing ideas, networking, permitting and all aspects of starting a business. Once ready, the library refers people to the SBDC, who assists in the areas mentioned above. Technical and other industry-specific advising can be provided through SCORE and the EIGERlab when needed.

The SBDC is here to help you with your small business needs. We enjoy working with our clients and are thrilled to see so many flourishing. Let us know if we can assist you, as you develop your idea into reality.

*Mike Mastroianni is director at the Illinois Small Business Development Center in Rockford.*

## Illinois Small Business Development Center at Rockford Chamber of Commerce



Providing Professional Guidance for Business Growth



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[www.rockfordchamber.com/illinois-sbdc](http://www.rockfordchamber.com/illinois-sbdc)

[www.rockfordsbdc.org](http://www.rockfordsbdc.org)

#### About the SBDC

The Illinois SBDC at the Rockford Chamber of Commerce offers services free of charge to aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners in the Rockford area, both chamber members and nonmembers. As a partnership between the Rockford Chamber and the Illinois DCEO, it operates out of NIU EIGERlab, NIU-Rockford, 8500 E. State St., and maintains an office at the chamber's downtown location. For questions, call 815-987-8100.