Annexing Small Business Success

Postal Annex Opens in Clearwater



Retired U.S. Army Veteran Ronald Gadsden wanted to start his own business and he found the right opportunity in a Postal Annex+ franchise, located in Clearwater, Florida. As with many first-time entrepreneurs, "I went into this pretty blind and didn't know about all the different aspects of running a business," says Gadsden. But a visit to Teresa Citron at Florida Bank, a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) partner, provided a link to a wealth of small business assistance. Citron explains, "Instantly I thought to send him to the SBDC at Pinellas County Economic Development."

The SBDC at Pinellas County Economic Development (PCED) offers business training and counseling to new and existing small businesses in Pinellas. SBDC at PCED analysts initially conducted a needs assessment and provided Gadsden with information on the resources available to assist him on his entrepreneurial path. Through a one-on-one SBDC consultation with a certified business consultant, Gadsden received assistance with navigating his franchise agreement and site location, as well as information on potential funding options. With an initial investment of \$85,000, it wasn't long before the right location was found and Gadsden was ready to open for business.

Or was he? "Opening this store has been a long time coming," laughs Gadsden. With his wife, Corliss, he began attending SBDC at PCED business classes that provide information on critical topics such as business plan development, tax and accounting

procedures, web and social media marketing, and programs for veterans and minorities. Additional coaching from the SBDC staff helped Gadsden fine tune presentations and pitches he had to make for franchise sales representatives, and concierge space at the SBDC offices provided an appropriate setting for business meetings. "Our goal is to provide the tools and counseling entrepreneurs need to be successful," affirms SBDC at PCED Director Dr. Cynthia Johnson. "We're here for our clients through every step of the start-up process, and we're still here for them long after their doors open." The SBDC also helped Gadsden make connections to key players at the Clearwater and Safety Harbor Chambers of Commerce. Gadsden comments, "These valuable contacts provided me with opportunities to promote my business at trade shows and gain sponsorship for the grand opening."

Gadsden also received staffing assistance from WorkNet Pinellas in the form of job descriptions and labor statistics, and information on tools such as the On-the-Job Training (OJT) program, which provides a unique opportunity for individuals who already possess some job-related skills and knowledge to "learn as they earn." "As my business grows, I look forward to participating in the OJT program," Gadsden explains. "The potential payroll savings could free-up dollars I could use to grow my business."

Postal Annex has been open for several months and is an authorized shipper for FedEx, UPS, the United States Post Office, and DHL. Other services include personal mail box rentals, shredding, high-speed copying, notary public, passport services, and the sale of office and shipping supplies, greeting cards and stamps. Gadsden could not be happier with the business' success: "We've waited a long time to fill a need and be able to support the neighborhood, and it feels great!" he remarks. About the assistance he's received from the SBDC at Pinellas County, he stresses, "The center and its staff were very helpful, and I owe them for giving me my start." He plans to continue expanding his business skills by attending additional SBDC training classes in the future.

Visit Postal Annex at www.postalannex.com/10013.

Learn more about the Small Business Development Center at Pinellas County Economic Development by visiting www.pced.org/sbdc, or call (727) 453-7200.

