

BUSINESS

Small businesses toast a milestone

The Small Business Development Center is 10 years old and for its birthday, it held a Toast to Small Businesses.

By CARLA BRANCH
Alexandria Times Staff
Writer

The U. S. Patent and Trademark Office National Inventors' Hall of Fame provided the perfect backdrop for last week's party, reminding attendees that Krispy Kreme, Oscar the Grouch and Tony the Tiger must have begun as ideas in small businesses. "It is very appropriate that we hold this event here in a place that celebrates the entrepreneurial spirit, a spirit that is so much a part of Alexandria's small business community," said Nancy Belmont, president and CEO of Belmont Inc. and chairman of the center's Board of Directors. "We are also here to celebrate the accomplishments of the Small Business Development Center, which has helped many of us over the past 10 years and brought so much happiness and success to our lives."

The SBDC is housed in the offices of the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, although it is a separate program with its own funding and board of directors. Since 1996, the center has assisted more than 3,500 businesses with information, referrals, reference materials and advice. It has helped to create 1,232 new jobs, helped clients to access more than \$39 million in new capital and generated over \$48.8 million in increased sales for the small businesses

it has served.

In addition to serving as chairman of the board, Belmont is a client. “When we first formed our company in 2000, we used the SBDC reference library,” she said. “When we decided we needed to hire an employee, the staff helped us with our loan application. I still call them with questions. We have a subcontract that required us to get several types of certifications. In 10 minutes, the staff was able to walk me through a process which might have taken me hours to negotiate,” she said.



Alexandria Times Staff
Photo/Bob Lennox
Helping to celebrate the Small Business Development Center's 10th birthday last week were Bill Reagan, Nora Partlow, Elizabeth Moon and Nancy Belmont.

Elizabeth Moon of Focus Data Solutions, agreed. “One of the first things we did when we started our company was join the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce,” she said. “They introduced us to the SBDC and the staff there has been helpful from then to now. They reviewed our business and marketing plans and pointed us in the direction of financing. Recently, when we decided to apply to become a woman-owned small business, they assisted us with that process as well. They don't just help people start businesses; they are a resource that we use even now that we have grown tremendously and that we will continue to use as long as we are in business.”

The Small Business Development Center provides many services to Alexandria's small businesses. They include cash flow assessment and management; expansion feasibility advice; financial analysis and access to capital sources; marketing strategies; federal contracting assistance and business recovery/disaster loan assistance. They receive funding from the City of Alexandria, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Commerce

Bank, William D. Euille and Associates and the U. S. Small Business Administration. Other contributors are BB&T, Burke & Herbert Bank, Dominion Virginia Power and Westfield Concession Management/Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority.

“The success of Alexandria is dependent on the success of our small businesses,” said Mayor William D. Euille. “You help to ensure that Alexandria maintains its uniqueness as a city in the Washington Metropolitan area. Therefore, a toast to all of the small businesses in the city and to the Small Business Development Center for helping those businesses.”