



Small business development centers recognized for roles

By Joyce Koballa

jkoballa@heraldstandard.com

Pennsylvania Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) have been recognized for their commitment and contributions to clients looking to start, grow or sustain a business.

St. Vincent College and the University of Pittsburgh locations were among four of the state's 18 centers to receive awards recently at this year's annual network in June in York, PA.

Awards were presented based on feedback from an annual survey administered to clients who received two or more hours of SBDC consulting services during 2014 and 2015.

According to Kelly Cofrancisco, outreach and partnership manager for Pennsylvania SBDC, 1,142 business owners completed the survey.

Last year, she said a total of 6,076 individuals and businesses received consulting through Pennsylvania's SBDC network centers.

She reported 40 were in Fayette County; 14 in Greene County, 111 in Washington County and 132 in Westmoreland County.

St. Vincent, which serves Fayette and Westmoreland counties, was one of three centers to receive the Happy Client Award for going above and beyond to satisfy clients earning a 100 percent on the

satisfaction metric.

A director at St. Vincent SBDC, believes the rating is a combination of professionalism, experience, responsiveness, empathy and attention to detail provided to clients.

'As management consultants we often have to tell small business owners things that they don't want to hear,' said Kunkel. 'Being able to do so with understanding and encouragement goes a long way in building healthy long-term client relationships and successful small businesses.'

The Targeted Service Award was presented to the University of Pittsburgh, which serves clients in Greene and Washington counties.

The award recognizes service to the entire Pennsylvania SBDC network in specific areas.

According to Ray Vargo, SBDC director at the University of Pittsburgh, the center has made a significant impact on the community through the Mon Valley Initiative.

As a nonprofit community and economic development coalition, the initiative is aimed at renovating and constructing affordable housing and assisting communities to develop and maintain their Main Street districts.

Vargo said SBDC received a grant from the Small Business Administration to become cer-

tified as lean educators taking lean principles from technology and translating them to Main Street businesses.

The center is currently working on a pilot initiative it will host starting in September open to small businesses.

The Planning for Profits seminar will include six sessions at no cost that will highlight nine lean small business principles, how to use and create a business model canvas and direct customer feedback.

Throughout the seminar, business owners will learn how to generate and improve cash flow, explore distribution channels for new sales, present their value to attract customers, discover how perception equals reality for small businesses and design a strategic path and measurable goals for growth.

In addition to providing data on SBDC program outcomes, Cofrancisco said client feedback also enables the SBDC to better understand the needs of business owners.

Those interested in joining the Be Local Network can contact Clint Rhodes at 724-439-7518 or by email at crhodes@heraldstandard.com. Discount cards are available at the Herald-Standard, 8 East Church St., Uniontown, and at the Greene County Messenger, 82 W. High St., Waynesburg.

