



Montana Small Business Development Center Network



Guiding Montana Businesses to Success

2021 Annual Report

Message from Montana SBDC State Director

According to the SBA Small Business Profile, in 2021 Montana small businesses accounted for 99.3% of all Montana businesses. They employed over 249,000 employees or 67.2% of the total workforce. They continue to drive Montana's economy towards prosperity. They provide opportunities for individuals that choose to work for themselves and bring stability to urban and rural communities alike. Providing resources and guidance for small businesses remains a top priority for the Montana Small Business Development Center (MTSBDC).

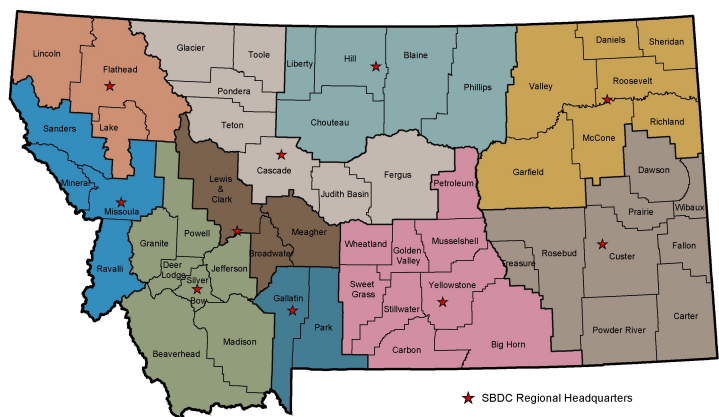
The MTSBDC serves entrepreneurs and small businesses through no-cost, confidential counseling and low-cost training related to business plan development, financial management, operational processes, loan application support, marketing initiatives, succession planning, and most recently, COVID-19 resources. Our Regional Directors and Business Advisors support clients every day across many industries.

In 2021, federal disaster funding was extended, additional federal and state programs were introduced, and the economy slowly began to recover. Tourism in Montana rebounded, providing increased spending across the state and new opportunities were presented for budding entrepreneurs.

Although the economy began to improve, the aftereffects of 2020 created a new environment for small businesses to navigate. The MTSBDC network assisted businesses through many challenges in 2021. The network guided business owners struggling through limited staffing, reduced operating hours, and capacity issues. Others looked to the SBDC for support with supply chain issues and raising equity capital. The network continued to assist clients with PPP and EIDL loans and helped business owners navigate new opportunities such as the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant and Restaurant Revitalization Fund.

Montana entrepreneurs and small business owners continue to be the backbone of local economies throughout the state. They provide jobs, shopping, dining, entertainment, and essential services for their local communities. This report highlights clients across the landscape of Montana and the incredible successes they have achieved with the assistance of the MTSBDC. We are proud to publish this summary of our economic impact for 2021.

Chad Moore
Montana SBDC State Director



Montana SBDC Staff



Chad Moore
State Director
*Dept. of
Commerce*



Lori Gilliland
Associate State
Director
*Dept. of
Commerce*
2021 State Star



Lorene Hintz
Regional
Director
Billings SBDC



Kevin Scharfe
SBDC Sr.
Business Advisor
Billings SBDC



Kayla Vokrel
Business Advisor
Billings SBDC



Jeff Turczyn
Regional
Director
Bozeman SBDC



Julie Jaksha
Regional
Director
Butte SBDC



Taylor Lovell
Business Advisor
Butte SBDC



Jason Nitschke
Regional
Director
Great Falls SBDC



Rich Gannon
Rural Business
Advisor
Great Falls SBDC



Joe LaPlante
Regional
Director
Havre SBDC



Ryan Loomis,
MBA
Regional
Director
Helena SBDC

Montana SBDC Staff



Dan Gorton
Regional
Director
Kalispell SBDC



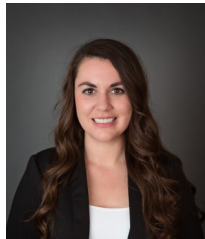
Tracy Baker
Regional
Director
Miles City SBDC



**Jennifer Stephens,
MBA**
Regional Director
Missoula SBDC



Jordan Stordahl
Business Advisor
Missoula SBDC



Shandy Moran
Regional Director
Wolf Point SBDC

CARES Funded COVID Staff



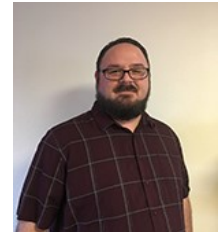
Melissa Wanamaker
SBDC COVID Specialist
Butte SBDC



Riley Mortensen
SBDC Cares Support
Havre SBDC



Jake Clark
SBDC COVID Specialist
Great Falls SBDC



Josh Bennett
SBDC COVID Specialist
Helena SBDC



Sarin Hoppe
SBDC COVID
Specialist
Miles City SBDC



Christine Littig
SBDC COVID
Specialist
Missoula SBDC



Quincy Walter
SBDC Program
Coordinator
Wolf Point SBDC



2021 Economic Impact

78

New Businesses Successfully Launched

59

Training Seminars Hosted

771

Training Attendees

101

Client Loans Approved

3,874

Jobs Supported

\$30,904,174

Financing Obtained by Clients

Lorene Hintz
Regional Director
Kevin Scharfe
SBDC Sr. Business Advisor
Kayla Vokrel
Business Advisor

Marble Table

Billings, MT



“When you have a dream that you have thought about for most of your life, you never really know you can achieve it until you step past fear and go for it! The Small Business Development Center gave my husband and I the necessary tools to get past the fear, dive into the numbers, and they surrounded us with an amazing group of talented people to support our dream of owning our own restaurant.”

Jen Marble, Co-Owner

With a lifelong love of food, Jason Marble became a chef and worked at several restaurants in Billings. In 2020, he and his wife Jen decided they wanted to open their own restaurant to turn their lifelong dream into a reality. Knowing that the combination of Jason’s culinary skills complimented Jen’s business mind, they decided to take a leap of faith in the middle of a global pandemic. Wanting to share their love for food in an environment filled with comfort, warmth, and a taste of home-cooked meals, they turned to the Billings SBDC for help.

SBDC Regional Director, Lorene Hintz helped them develop their business plan, cash flow projections, and provided them with additional resources. They were referred to a mentor who had expertise in marketing and communications to help them with an initial marketing plan.

With the help of the SBDC the business was able to obtain a \$80,000 SBA loan along with personal investment of \$196,000. A year later they received a \$100,000 SBA 7(a) loan for their expansion and created 29 new jobs in Yellowstone County.

The Marbles found a location with restaurant fixtures already installed. Jen wanted to make sure the restaurant conveyed a charming atmosphere for her customers. With pandemic restrictions in place, Jen made the best of the situation by placing repurposed antique doors as dividers between the tabletops to make individual booths. Her ingenuity helped create the charm she had envisioned for The Marble Table. The uniqueness of the decor is coupled with hospitality; Jen and Jason make sure to greet customers, bring meals out to the tables, and visit with the diners.

When The Marble Table opened in November of 2020 they were only able to have nine tables. The Billings community showed up to support the business causing Jen and Jason to have to turn away over fifty tables a day. In May 2021 they needed to expand the size of the restaurant in order to meet the customer demand and grow the business. They expanded their footprint by renting the vacant space next door, adding more tables, and increasing sales.

Jen and Jason conquered their fears and continued to move forward in growing their business. “The community has been here every day supporting us. We wouldn't be here without them! Don't let fear drive your dreams. We are successful because we chose to muffle the negative voices and look to our future even in a pandemic” said Jen Marble.

“I loved working with Jen and her passion for making everyone at the table family! I can’t wait to see how this dream becomes the next hot spot in downtown Billings” said Lorene Hintz.

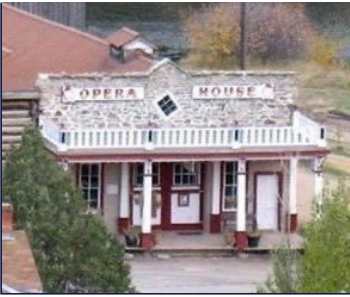
Julia Jaksha
Regional Director
Taylor Lovell
Business Advisor
Melissa Wanamaker
Covid Specialist



Butte Regional SBDC

Virginia City Players

Virginia City, MT



“Melissa and the Butte SBDC helped our business tremendously starting in November 2020, in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Melissa was committed to the whole process and ensured we were receiving up-to-date information on opportunities our business qualified for. If it hadn’t been for the funding we received from the SBA, I don’t know that we would have made it through the year. The money we received has allowed us to stay open for this season and continue planning next season’s events to attract tourism to Virginia City.”

- Bill Koch, Owner

Bill and Christina Koch are the owners of the Virginia City Players, which is the oldest continuously operating summer stock theatre company west of the Mississippi River. The summer of 2021 was their 73rd season, proving they have been a regional favorite for many years.

Like so many others who serve the tourism industry, their business was closed due to COVID-19 during the summer of 2020. When mandates closed their business, they explored every option to pay their employees and keep their business afloat. “The Opera House is the hub of Virginia City. When we had to close in July 2020, people lost hotel reservations, restaurant reservations, everything. People come to Virginia City to see the Players. If you don’t believe in yourself and your business, you shouldn’t be in business. I believe in this place with all my Heart and Soul,” said Bill.

They reached out to Julie Jaksha, Regional Director at the Butte, Montana SBDC office. She assisted with a five-hour power coaching session to assist them with marketing materials for crowdfunding. She also assured them that government assistance program information for shuttered venue operators would be available soon. Julie then introduced them to her COVID-19 Business Advisor, Melissa Wannamaker.

Over the next few months, Melissa helped Bill and Christina prepare applications to receive PPP funding and a shuttered venue operators grant. This assistance saved twelve seasonal jobs. It also ensured the future of the long-standing theatre which provides economic impact in the rural towns of Virginia City, Sheridan, Ennis, and Twin Bridges.

Today, Virginia City Players is looking forward to next season with additional improvements! The summer 2022 season will open on Memorial Day with silent movies. Bill is excited about the renovations to his 1915 Cremona Photoplayer - one of only two leG in the world! The instrument is sixteen feet wide and features two side chests containing a xylophone, flute, bass pipes, bass drum, cymbals, and more; the source of soundtracks for silent movies at that time.

Gallatin Valley Carpet One Bozeman, MT



“What they were able to do was not only get me the full amount that I needed, but they were also able to do it within a three-week time frame. Unbelievable.”

Stuart Beiswanger, Owner

Gallatin Valley Furniture/Carpet One has been a staple in Bozeman, Montana since 1946. Stuart Beiswanger was employed there for nine years, from 1991 to 2000. After working in Gallatin Valley Carpet One for many years and knowing the previous owners were looking at their exit strategy, Stuart saw an opportunity. His vision included improvements in operations, sales, the customer experience, and the overall employee experience. Stuart Beiswanger returned to Carpet One in 2014 and began planning the purchase of the business in 2015. In 2021, Stuart turned to the Bozeman SBDC’s Regional Director Jeff Turczyn at Prospera Business Network for assistance.

The SBDC assisted with the funding process by providing communication and support for both Stuart and Prospera’s Loan Fund Manager during the application process. With the assistance of the SBDC and Prospera Business Network, Stuart obtained financing of \$300,000 and completed the purchase. The purchase allowed ownership to stay local and facilitated the retention of ten full-time and one part-time positions. Two additional full-time positions are projected for the near future. Stuart also contracts with numerous local flooring installers. He has implemented operational efficiencies which have translated to higher net profits and employee salaries.

The SBDC provided a connection for Stuart to the resources Prospera offers business owners. He has taken advantage of classes and business leadership workshops and has become a participating member of the Prospera Business Network to help grow his business. Stuart is a member of Prospera’s *Emerging Companies Roundtable*, which brings local business leaders together to discuss trends and challenges within the local business community. Through business leadership and networking events, Stuart shares his experience and knowledge with other business owners to provide insight and perspective. He has become an active participant in creating and maintaining a healthy business community.

Gallatin Valley Carpet One is an active member of the Chamber of Commerce, South West Montana Building Industry Association (SWMBIA) and is a major contributor with the Tunnels 2 Towers Foundation. The foundation supports veterans and their families by providing mortgage-free housing to those in need.

Jason Nitschke
Regional Director
Rich Gannon
Rural Business Advisor
Jake Clark
COVID Specialist/ Business Advisor



Great Falls Regional SBDC

Los Tacos de Montana, LLC

Cut Bank, MT



“Rich Gannon with the Great Falls SBDC helped me pilot my vision for Los Tacos De Montana through his extensive knowledge and understanding of what it takes to start and run a successful business. Thanks to Rich and SBDC for being very personable and knowledgeable in helping their clients.”

-Heidi Morales, Co-Owner

Heidi, a teacher with a long line of Blackfeet-Irish entrepreneurs in her family, spent most of her childhood helping her grandmother with the family business. Cesar was raised in a traditional Mexican family, and he loves cooking authentic Mexican food, especially street tacos.

After serving as a Marine, traveling the country, and serving his community as a police officer, Cesar and his wife Heidi saw an opportunity to serve their community in another way.

The growth of food trucks all over the nation has been incredible. The soaring numbers of visitors to Glacier National Park in the last five years inspired the opportunity to open a food truck with Cesar’s authentic Mexican food.

They met with Great Falls Development Authority’s SBDC Rural Business Advisor, Rich Gannon, to explore options and figure out how to get started. Rich helped them understand the differences in business structures and how to register an LLC. He also shared opportunities for QuickBooks training, traffic counts to help with their business forecasts, and a Glacier Port Authority Grant Application.

Heidi and Cesar used the Great Falls SBDC’s LivePlan software to do financial forecasts and create a business plan. The plan and projections were integral in receiving a \$2,000 micro startup grant from the Glacier County Regional Port Authority. They also attended a three-part class hosted by the GFSBDC called “The Website Bootcamp” to develop and launch an online footprint for travelers to find them. <https://www.glaciertacos.com> [glaciertacos.com].

The startup created a self-employment opportunity for Heidi and her husband during record-high visitation to Glacier National Park. In addition to the Glacier Port Authority \$2,000 grant, the couple invested nearly \$5,000 of their own money. Those funds purchased a trailer for storage and transportation, a 36-inch flat top griddle, and the material to build their custom portable taco stand.

According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, Glacier County has the lowest median household income of any county in the state of Montana, just 66% of the state average. Glacier County also has the second highest poverty rate of any county in Montana. Therefore, the ability to supplement a family’s income, capture non-resident tourism dollars, and contribute to the income of other businesses has had a cascading effect on the regional economy.

The couple is on pace to purchase about \$10,000 worth of supplies during the 2021 tourism season, including locally raised beef and pork. While their initial plans are to run the taco stand on their own, the couple hopes to grow the business to a point where they will be able to hire additional staff.

Tracy Baker
Regional Director
Sarin Hoppe
Business Advisor/ COVID Specialist



Miles City Regional SBDC

Lame Jones Meats

Plevna, MT



“When we first came up with the idea for a meat processing facility, it was very overwhelming on where to start or how to start, the SBDC showed us! From the start up process of building a professional business plan to working on financials and filling out grants, they guided us and spent many hours working with us. We never could have done it without them.”

Cassie O’Conner, Co-Owner

Ry O’Connor grew up on a ranch in Plevna, Montana, with strong community roots. He briefly left the state to attend college at Dickinson State University (DSU) in North Dakota, where he met his future wife Cassie, who also grew up in Montana.

After completing college, Ry and Cassie married and returned to Montana, purchasing part of Ry’s family ranch where they raise cattle, sheep and grow certified organic crops.

In 2020, the lack of butcher shops and meat processors in eastern Montana became apparent. Even before the pandemic, there was a demand for more USDA-certified meat processors in the state. Ry and Cassie understood the frustration of fellow ranchers and their inability to butcher their livestock locally. They sympathized with consumers worried about the beef supply in grocery stores. Most importantly, they understood the importance of being progressive and adaptable in the agriculture industry.

While attending DSU, Cassie and Ry took a meat cutting class off-campus at Dean’s Meat Market. With that knowledge and the demand for locally owned processors, they decided to explore the possibility of opening a meat processing facility on their ranch.

When researching their options, Cassie came across a Small Business Development Center post that piqued her interest. Cassie reached out to Tracy Baker, Regional Director, at the Miles City SBDC office.

Tracy assisted Ry and Cassie with their business plan and financial projections. She introduced additional resources through the Food and Ag Development Center (FADC), Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC), and Great Northern Development Corporation (GNDC) to assist with the project. Tami Burke, FADC Director at GNDC; Beth Epley, Executive Director at EPEDC; Dara Deines, Community Development Specialist at EPEDC; and Shandy Hanks, SBDC Regional Director at GNDC; assisted Ry and Cassie with completion of a Meat Processing Grant application made available by the state through Cares Act funding. They also assisted with the Growth Through Agriculture Grant (GTA) application process.

In September 2020, Lame Jones Meats was awarded \$150,000 through the Meat Processing Grant. The grant funds were utilized to construct a new building for the operation. In November 2020, they were awarded \$20,000 through the GTA grant, which helped them purchase a smoker and sausage maker.

Ryan Loomis, MBA

Regional Director

Josh Bennett

Business Advisor/ COVID Specialist



Helena Regional SBDC

Creative Beginnings

Helena, MT



“The SBDC has been essential in assisting Creative Beginnings in gaining the financial support and freedom to expand. This will allow us to offer more quality care options to families in need of childcare.”

Rachel Bray, *Owner*

Rachel Bray watched her Mom run an in-home child care facility while she was growing up and went on to work in child care facilities in college. After college, Rachel took a job that included a great deal of travel, and she was missing out on the school activities with her kids. She also saw the need for quality childcare facilities in East Helena. She opened Creative Beginnings in 2014, which offers a family-oriented atmosphere and activities based on the children’s desires and needs.

Today the facility provides quality service which is above the state standard for childcare. They participate in the STARS to Quality program and offer summer care for school-aged children that the city has stopped providing. With the growth of Creative Beginnings and the need for childcare in the area, Rachel knew that it was time to grow her business.

Creative Beginnings reached out to the Helena Small Business Development Center for assistance as they were seeking funding to expand services in the East Helena area. SBDC Regional Director Ryan Loomis helped introduce owner Rachel Bray and her husband Vince to the Montana Business Assistance Connection and work with them to acquire loans for their expansion and secure funding for a new property and resources for renovation. The SBDC was able to help review cash flow evaluations, worked with Rachel and Vince to get their funding source, and assisted with human resource planning for the expansion. Ryan has also been researching grant opportunities and providing applications. Rachel was able to secure a Child Care Stabilization Grant for Creative Beginnings.

Creative Beginnings is planning on expanding its services in the East Helena area and surrounding community, extending its service to a 7500 square foot building, and adding 20 to 25 employees. This will allow Creative Beginnings to add service to 40 or 50 more children in addition to the 30 children currently being served.

The impacts of the expansion provide more than just daycare. Through the Best Beginnings program, Rachel will be able to increase her provision of care for underserved populations that East Helena and the surrounding community greatly need. It will also continue to help an employable workforce who seek childcare.

Joe LaPlante
Regional Director
Riley Mortensen
CARES Support Specialist



Havre Regional SBDC

Tom Jones Cooling & Heating Havre, MT



“It was great working with the SBDC. They answered all my questions and helped with the business plan and financial projections.”

Tom Jones, *Owner*

Tom Jones has worked in the heating and air conditioning industry for more than 13 years. Demand for HVAC services in the local market continued to increase, and Tom saw an opportunity. In 2021, Tom and his wife Emily decided to explore options to open their own business.

When beginning their initial planning, Tom and Emily received a referral from another local business owner to the Havre Small Business Development Center. They reached out to Joe LaPlante, SBDC Regional Director at Bear Paw Development Corporation. Joe spent time with Tom and Emily working through their initial questions about starting their business. They reviewed possible business entities and discussed potential liabilities and how to reduce risk. Emily, who has bookkeeping experience, filed all the paperwork necessary to start the business.

Joe continued to meet with Tom and Emily. He assisted in writing a business plan, developing financial projections, and creating a loan package. Within a couple of months of approaching Joe at the SBDC, Tom and Emily received the loan they needed to purchase equipment and get started. The company quickly launched a Facebook page, website, and other marketing to promote the new business. The marketing efforts proved effective as the business was busy from the onset.

Tom’s industry experience, professionalism, and continued training are part of his strategy to ensure he continues to increase market share. He understands the latest technology, like Wi-Fi thermostats, and can explain the benefits to his customers. He stays up-to-date on industry standards and refrigeration variances to help his customers make environmentally friendly decisions.

The business supports two full-time jobs and has a mission to give back to the community. They sponsor a local youth soccer team and have provided giveaways at local events. After only a few months in business, they purchased air duct cleaning equipment and expanded services. They are now serving other nearby communities as the business and its reputation continues to grow.

Glacier Family Chiropractic and Wellness Kalispell, MT



“I felt much more confident legally forming a business and getting established with Dan’s guidance .”

-Dr. Hailey Axberg, *Owner*

Dr. Dr. Hailey Axberg is a young Chiropractor and founder of Glacier Family Chiropractic & Wellness in Columbia Falls, MT. She graduated in October of 2021 and opened her family clinic the following February. Dr. Hailey and her fiancé initially planned to work as associate doctors after their graduation. When those plans fell through, they decided to explore options of opening a practice in their ideal location.

As Dr. Ryan finished chiropractic school, Dr. Hailey began researching options to open their family chiropractic clinic in Columbia Falls, MT. Dr. Hailey was referred to Dan Gorton for assistance at the Small Business Development Center through a local recommendation. Due to the unexpected nature of forming her business immediately after graduation, she needed guidance with all the business basics. She required assistance forming an LLC or S-Corp, tax guidance, accounting guidance, and other formalities of launching a small business.

Dan assisted with the process by providing free counseling related to Dr. Hailey's inquires. She was impressed with Dan's timely, thorough responses to her questions and his continuous availability by phone and email. With minimal business education, Dr. Hailey felt much more confident legally forming her family's business through Dan's guidance. In less than a year and without a business loan (or a family fortune!), Glacier Family Chiropractic & Wellness was established in December 2020 and officially opened to the public in February 2021. The clinic originally opened in 15'x10' office space and then expanded to its current building in downtown Columbia Falls in July of 2021. It has since grown into a thriving community of health-centered folks in the Flathead Valley, serving all ages and stages of life.

Offerings at Glacier Family Chiropractic & Wellness range from whole-family wellness chiropractic care, beginner yoga classes, holistic health education, as well as supplements and essential oils. The philosophy at Glacier Family Chiropractic & Wellness is centered around a salutogenic approach towards health, one that empowers people in their ability to be healthy and well. Drs. Hailey and Ryan have plans for expansion within the next three years to include increased patient care space, an infrared sauna, and a digital x-ray room. Dr. Hailey continues her education in pediatric, prenatal, and postpartum chiropractic care, and Dr. Ryan is expected to join the staff as a full-time chiropractor in 2022. The couple is so thankful that they were able to successfully formulate their business amidst a pandemic, despite unexpected circumstances. They are grateful for Dan's guidance in creating Glacier Family Chiropractic & Wellness.

Jennifer Stephens, MBA

Regional Director

Jordan Stordahl

Business Advisor

Christine Littig

Covid Specialist



Missoula Regional SBDC

Girls Run Missoula

Missoula, MT



“The SBDC supported the transformation of my business plan into a successful, COVID-19 operational, and highly functioning program for young women in Missoula.”

Angela Bridegam, *Owner*

After working decades in the field of domestic and sexual violence, Angela Bridegam returned to school at the University of Montana to pursue her Master’s in Public Administration and Nonprofit Management. While in graduate school, Angela created a business plan for Girls Run Missoula to give young girls the skills and confidence to avoid adverse experiences throughout their lives. The business plan focused on teen dating violence, suicide, substance abuse, eating disorders, and mental health challenges to name a few.

The Missoula community was experiencing its first full swing of the COVID pandemic when Angela graduated. With high anxiety, fear of the unknown, and the stress of both teaching and mothering her children, Angela looked to her Girls Run Missoula (GRM) business plan as a response to growing challenges around safe childcare and made an appointment with the Missoula SBDC.

Her interaction with the SBDC started at a very basic level. This included referrals to legal support, tax information, processes to register through the state as a business, insurance and budget creation. Further assistance included cash flow projections, options for hiring employees, and suggestions for how to move through transitional periods as the business grows. The SBDC provided moral support when addressing the uncertainty of running a business in a pandemic.

Knowing she needed to act fast, Angela created a pilot program to see if her dream could become reality. With the support of COVID Specialist Christine Littig at the Missoula SBDC office, Angela has successfully completed a pilot program and fully launched Girls Run Missoula. In a short time GRM has seen 200% growth in participation numbers between the 2nd and 3rd season, and again between the 3rd and 4th season. The assistance in fine-tuning GRM marketing strategies drew the attention and support of a year-long sponsorship by Toyota and other individual donors.

By many measures, girls are excelling like never before, and yet their anxiety and depression levels are higher than ever. Girls Run Missoula creates an opportunity to change this trend by instilling protective factors such as social connection, concrete support networks, and social and emotional competence. While GRM is still focused on those initial business plan goals, GRM is also aware that the program is creating an environment and support system that is helping young women find focus, strength and mental fitness (as well as physical) during the COVID pandemic and beyond.

Shandy Hanks Moran
Regional Director
Quincy Walter
SBDC Program Coordinator



Wolf Point Regional SBDC

Farris Farm and Auto Scoby, MT



"We have utilized the SBDC for many of their services from workshops to loan packaging assistance. They have been a valuable resource in purchasing our business."
-Mike and Steph Farris, Owners

After almost 25 years of being an employee at Carquest, Mike Farris went from spinning wrenches in the shop and helping customers at the front desk to purchasing the business with his wife, Steph. Farris Farm and Auto is a family-owned business passionate about delivering excellence in everything they do.

The couple was exploring the possibility of purchasing the business when Steph attended her first Quickbooks training. After the class, a lending partner suggested that she should reach out to Shandy at the Wolf Point SBDC for assistance in navigating the purchasing process. Shandy Moran, Wolf Point SBDC Regional Director, assisted Mike and Steph with business planning, financial projections, and cash flow analysis. Ultimately the plan they developed helped them secure the financial assistance they would need to make the dream a reality. The couple secured a commercial bank loan and additional financing through Great Northern Development Corporation, The Wolf Point SBDC's host organization.

Owning a business has challenged both Mike and Steph with role changes. Steph stepped in as the office manager and bookkeeper for Farris Farm and Auto. Mike shifted from being the full-time shop mechanic to the lead parts technician. He spends many late nights making sure clients receive superior service in the machine shop. Farris Farm and Auto supports the local ag community and finds themselves giving back through fair donations and event sponsorships. Looking back at his history in the store, Mike sees a lot that has changed in twenty-five years. However, the need for parts and quality customer service remains a constant for Mike and Steph.



MONTANA SBA RESOURCE PARTNERS COMMIT TO HELPING SERVICE MEMBERS TRANSITION TO SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

In June, 2021 the Montana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) completed a first-of-its-kind Veteran Ready Business Advisor training with the COMMIT Foundation, a national nonprofit working to change the narrative around veteran transition in our country. Delivered in partnership with the Big Sky Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC), SBDC advisors and resource partners expanded their cross-cultural awareness to better serve their veteran clients transitioning to small business ownership in Montana.

“As Montana’s economy continues to recover from the pandemic, our SBDC advisors know that a diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem is vital for the strength of our communities,” said Chad Moore, Montana SBDC State Director. “This training helps to ensure that our advisors have the tools they need to help transitioning service members find success in small business ownership after they leave the military.”

A recent study from the Syracuse University Institute for Veterans & Military Families points to unique challenges facing veteran entrepreneurs as they started businesses after leaving the military. In fact, “46 percent of veteran entrepreneurs indicated that navigating the resources in their local community was not easy.” This data combined with the fact that veteran entrepreneurs are having a harder time accessing capital than non-veteran businesses led the VBOC to partner with the SBDC to help Montana become even more “Veteran Ready” with efforts to support veteran entrepreneurship.

“Montanans understand that our communities are stronger when veteran entrepreneurs thrive,” said Dustin Frost, Big Sky VBOC Director. “With resources like the VBOC and now “Veteran Ready” business advisors all over the state, transitioning service members can confidently know that their business dreams can flourish in Montana with the assistance of individuals who not only care about their success, but can understand and relate to their military experience and unique transition challenges.”

The COMMIT Foundation was founded in 2012 and is headquartered in Bozeman, Montana. The mission is to help exceptional American service members and veterans’ transition into successful roles and careers post-service through veteran transition and workforce development programs. The highly customized Veteran Programs help individuals fill gaps in information, confidence, imagination and ultimately find their purpose after military service. The Corporate Education Program draws upon decades of workforce development and military expertise to help organizations shift from being veteran friendly to veteran ready and support the successful transition, reintegration and reinvestment of military talent into their organizations and communities. To learn more about The COMMIT Foundation visit COMMITFOUNDATION.ORG.

MONTANA SBDC ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

The Montana Small Business Development Center Network (SBDC), headquartered at the Montana Department of Commerce announced that SBDC Associate State Director Lori Gilliland was named the 2021 Montana “State Star.” The State Star is a national honor that recognizes outstanding performers from Small Business Development Centers around the country.

“Lori’s work for the Montana SBDC Network is vital to the success of our centers that serve Montana’s entrepreneurs,” said Montana SBDC State Director Chad Moore. “She is always happy to lend her expertise to find answers and troubleshoot problems for the entire network, recognizing her as the Montana SBDC State Star is well deserved.”

Gilliland has served as the Associate State Director in the Lead Center at the Montana Department of Commerce in Helena since 2009. The Lead Center provides support to all 10 of Montana’s regional centers charged with providing free one-on-one counseling and low-cost training opportunities for Montana’s entrepreneurs and small business owners.

“Lori is a valued asset as she guides and leads the SBDC network to meet the goals and milestones the SBA sets for each center. She provides helpful and practical advice to center directors as they run the SBDC programs throughout the state,” said Billings Regional SBDC Director Lorene Hintz who won the State Star in 2010. “She works with each center to implement new and improve old processes as she strives to advance SBDC services.”

“Anytime I have ever needed assistance she is able to help or always finds the solution,” said Shandy Hanks Moran, Wolf Point Regional Director and winner of last year’s State Star accolade. “Without her assistance, we would not be able to do what we do. She has been an integral part of the network for a lot of years.”

The Montana SBDC is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Montana Department of Commerce. For more information on SBDC services, and to find your regional center visit SBDC.MT.GOV.



Contact Us:

Billings Regional Center

Big Sky Economic Development
406.254.6014

Helena Regional Center

Helena College
406.447.6376

Bozeman Regional Center

Prospera Business Network
406.587.3113

Miles City Regional Center

Miles Community College
406.874.6168

Butte Regional Center

Headwaters RC&D
406.533.6780

Kalispell Regional Center

Flathead Valley Community College
406.756.3836

Great Falls Regional Center

Great Falls Development Authority
406.750.0314

Missoula Regional Center

University of Montana
406.243.4770

Havre Regional Center

Bear Paw Development Corporation
406.399.1557

Wolf Point Regional Center

Great Northern Development Corporation
406.653.2590

Visit [SBDC.MT.GOV/ABOUT/OUR-LOCATIONS](https://www.sbdc.mt.gov/about/our-locations) to learn more and make an appointment with an advisor in your area.

Check out [SBDC.MT.GOV](https://www.sbdc.mt.gov) for more information on our programs, trainings, events, success stories, and our Online Classroom.

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