Getting down to business

Nevada Small Business Development Center helps businesses statewide start up, streamline and stay on top of their game.

Tucked away in the Ansari Business Building on the Reno campus is the headquarters of a mighty economic generator: the Nevada Small Business Development Center. Serving the entire state, this unit within the College of Business has helped countless businesses start, streamline and succeed—with services that are either low cost or free.

With offices in Carson City, Elko, Ely, Fallon, Hawthorne, Henderson, Las Vegas, Laughlin, Pahrump, Reno and Winnemucca, as well as many services offered online and/or in Spanish, the Nevada Small Business Development Center reaches to all corners of the state and supports the state’s diverse population of entrepreneurs and business owners. And, in conjunction with the University’s Business Services Group, the center helps business small and large. From sole proprietorships and ma and pa startups to casinos and airports, the College of Business has services geared toward any business in the state.

Since its inception in May 1985, thousands have been helped by the Nevada Small Business Development Center. Here are just a few of the many stories to be told of businesses—large and small—and entrepreneurs who found pathways to success via the center.

Center for Regional Studies produces low-cost, high-quality economic impact study for Airport Authority

Krys Bart, president and CEO of the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority, can’t say enough about how great the Center for Regional Studies at the Nevada Small Business Development Center is. Bart hired Brian Bonnenfant, program manager for the Center for Regional Studies, to conduct an economic impact study for the Reno-Tahoe International and Reno-Stead airports. She was more than pleased with the result, as well as the value she received.

“The study they did was incredibly good and inclusive, and it came at a very reasonable cost,” Bart says.

The study, which was published last October, cost close to $30,000, which is about a fifth the cost of such studies if done by private consultants, she notes.

“If we had gone outside the community to do this, it may have had a fancier cover and more fluff, but we would have paid in the neighborhood of $150,000,” says Bart, who has previous experience commissioning economic impact studies.

The Center for Regional Studies is largely self-funded, but nonprofit, which allows the center to offer high-quality reports at low cost, Bonnenfant notes. “We are very affordable.”

Clients who use the center’s services “get very accurate data at half the cost, if not less, than for a consultant,” he adds, confirming Bart’s assessment.

For the Airport Authority study, Bonnenfant was able to draw on expertise in the College of Business, which houses the Nevada Small Business Development Center. Associate Dean and Foundation Professor Kambiz Rafleef is an expert on the airline industry and the economic impact of transportation systems.
We had a leg up with Dr. Raffiee,” Bart says. “We have this expertise right in our backyard, and it’s expertise that is readily available to everyone. When you consider the standing of the College of Business at the University—it is so well known and has a national reputation—why would you not use these services?”

Bonnenfant notes that clients of the Center for Regional Studies have access through his office to many resources within the University, including expert faculty.

Raffiee says doing the study was important, not only to the Airport Authority, but to the community: “Aviation is an important industry influencing economic growth and development in Nevada. Air transportation is an integral part of the transportation infrastructure of Nevada and plays an important role in achieving a successful economic development and diversification plan in the state. Northern Nevada’s economy grows as its air service expands, thus Reno-Tahoe International and Reno Stead Airports catalyze business enterprise, job growth, and investment throughout the region.”

The study found that the two airports had a total economic impact of $2 billion and a total employment impact of 22,138 jobs in all industries and sectors in northern Nevada in fiscal year 2010.

Bart notes that contrary to popular wisdom, the Airport Authority does not operate on tax dollars. “We are a quasi-governmental organization and we operate like a private entity. We generate our own revenue.”

Thus, it was an additional advantage to her that Bonnenfant and Raffiee not only delivered the study, but also gave presentations to the Airport Authority’s board of directors, preceded at a press conference, and were available to the media to answer questions.

“The credibility lies in having the University stand behind the results,” she says. “When you consider the time involved in delivering the study and in giving the press conference, the value is incredible.”

The study wasn’t just about one business, Bart notes. The airport is a community of businesses—the airlines, rental car agencies, concessionaires. Not to mention, the Reno-Tahoe International Airport has U.S. Customs and serves as a hub for national and international distribution and manufacturing businesses.

“Our airport can handle anything that flies,” she says, adding that by November, the airport anticipates adding charter cargo flights from China to Reno. “It’s cheaper to fly directly, non-stop into Reno from China, she says, noting that Reno is north of San Francisco and west of Los Angeles and at least 300 nautical miles closer to China than either California city.

By using the center, Bart also knew that the results would not be colored by politics. “If they had come out with results that were negative, we would have had to accept them because we knew there was no political influence. When you use the Nevada Small Business Development Center [the administering entity of the Center for Regional Studies], it’s factual, not political. They use hard data.”

When running a business, hard data and real facts are the only things that matter, she notes. “You want to see real results, not results colored by local politics.”

“Our community has been mischaracterized,” Bart says, “We’re a university community, not a gaming community. The University is an asset that needs to be touted worldwide. By partnering with entities such as the Economic Development Authority of Nevada[EADWN] and the University, we really have the opportunity to grow business in this region. We’ve barely begun.”

To find out more about the Center for Regional Studies at the Nevada Small Business Development Center, contact Brian Bonnenfant, (775) 784-1771 or bonnen@unr.edu, or visit http://centerforregionalstudies.org.
The lights are on: National Automobile Museum saves big after free energy consultation

The National Automobile Museum in Reno is saving close to $30,000 a year on lighting costs after working with Peter Millar, an energy management specialist in the University’s Business Environmental Program within the Nevada Small Business Development Center. The vintage vehicles have never gleamed so brightly.

Jackie Frady, the executive director of the National Auto Museum (The Harrah Collection) in Reno, says she had resigned herself to lower quality lighting if the museum was retrofitted to become more energy efficient, but was delighted with the unexpected outcome: “Because the savings were substantial, the museum had anticipated lighting quality would be sacrificed to achieve this result,” she says. “It was the opposite, as there was markedly enhanced quality. The colors of the museum’s automobiles are truer and richer and the exhibition galleries are more vibrant.”

The museum, which opened in 1989, is one of the most comprehensive public displays of automobiles in the Western Hemisphere with more than 200 cars, and has been named one of “America’s five greatest automobile museums,” by AutoWeek magazine. The building comprises more than 105,000 square feet on one floor and is located on the Truckee River in downtown Reno.

Millar says it was “a pleasure” to work with Frady and her team at the auto museum because they were open to new ideas and were willing to take the time to bring in vendors and test various lights. “Some bulbs would blind you if you looked directly at them,” he says, adding that light bulbs give off light in different colors along the spectrum, and some colors don’t work in a display setting, such as the auto museum. In addition, some vendors’ bulbs were of inconsistent quality. More than 600 lamps were replaced during the retrofitting.

Millar also reviewed documentation, contracts, warranties, as well as grant applications. “I nurture these projects along,” he says, noting that it took about a year to conduct the project from analysis through product testing, to installation.

After much testing and review, the auto museum decided to go with LED replacement bulbs from a local distributor backed by General Electric Co. The project was such a success that GE is now using the auto museum’s retrofit as “a game-changing example” of how a business that needs high quality lighting can benefit from a retrofit, Millar notes. The old bulbs used 90 watts of power, the new ones just 17.

While the annual energy savings alone were substantial—$18,000, nearly $30 per fixture—Millar found maintenance and cooling savings, as well. “The auto museum had one key person who was constantly changing bulbs because the old bulbs burned out quickly,” he notes. In addition, the new bulbs are cooler than the old ones, which results in lower air conditioning costs.

“The ROI (return on investment) was close to 100 percent,” Millar says. “That’s like having a bank account that pays you the cost of your investment after one year. The savings over the first year pay for the project, and the next year you get your investment back and, again through each subsequent year.”

Millar uses sophisticated evaluation tools to look at ROI versus the capital costs. He can also determine what inaction would cost over the coming years. “What would be the cost of doing nothing?”

Says Frady: “The National Automobile Museum (The Harrah Collection) is extremely grateful for the services Peter Millar provided with a recent lighting retrofit project. The successful results achieved with this project were due to his involvement, expertise and commitment. As a non-profit organization, this help was invaluable and the long-term benefits will make a meaningful difference.”

Millar holds a master’s in environmental engineering from Stanford, has won national awards for energy-efficient product development and is named on a number of patents internationally and in the United States, including the patent on a window technology being used in the Empire State Building retrofit.

To find out more about the Business Environmental Program, call Christopher Lynch, director, (775) 834-3687 or (800) 882-3233; or visit: unrbep.org.
BEP guides businesses through regulatory maze

The Business Environmental Program within the Nevada Small Business Development Center works with new and existing businesses helping them stay in compliance with environmental regulations, minimize or reduce waste and pollutants, and fill out permit applications, according to the program’s director, Christopher Lynch. “We are a neutral third party that people can come to and ask questions,” he says. “All services in the Business Environmental Program are free and confidential.”

The program is statewide, with offices in Reno and staff located in Las Vegas. Lynch says he helps new businesses make sure they’ve “dotted the i’s and crossed the t’s before they even get started,” so that there is less back-and-forth with regulatory agencies at the local, state and federal level. “We’ve found that we can help them through the regulatory maze and put together a better permit application in the first place, so they get approved.”

In addition, the program helps existing businesses assess environmental and energy issues. “Businesses should address environmental and energy issues just like any other business issue—proactively,” he says. “Don’t just manage your business to compliance standards. You should look at how you operate. Maybe you could use less hazardous materials, so you don’t need a permit in the first place. Or, you could use different solvents or chemicals to lessen your environmental footprint.”

To find out more about the Business Environmental Program, call Christopher Lynch, director, (775) 834-3687 or (800) 882-3233; or visit unrbep.org.

Family-owned business thrives in Sparks

After Mel Schlicker decided to move his distribution business from Bellingham, Wash., to Sparks, Nev., he contacted Rod Jorgensen, the director of counseling and management consultant with the Nevada Small Business Development Center.

“We’d been eyeballing Reno for several years,” Schlicker says. “We had a very viable business in the state of Washington, but we left because of the attractiveness of Nevada, and in particular, this specific part of Nevada.”

Schlicker and his wife, Marlene, and son, Don, run Ziegler & Ames, a wholesale distributor of cremation urns, whose primary market is family-owned funeral homes across the United States and in Canada.

Jorgensen says that this location is ideal for distribution centers, especially those that import from China such as Ziegler & Ames: “A product from China can be here from Oakland in three hours on I-80. This area works well as a hub.”

Since starting Ziegler & Ames six years ago, the Schlickers had outgrown their facility twice and needed to move. “If you’re going to pick up and move down the road, you might as well keep going,” Schlicker says, adding that moving to Nevada was wise: “I would shout loudly that of all the decisions I’ve had to make in my life businesswise, this is one of the most intelligent ones—to move the business here. This is great place to do business. You guys rock!”

For starters, facility costs are significantly lower here than in Washington, he notes: “We moved from a 7,000-square-foot facility to a 24,000-square-foot facility, which was much newer, much nicer,” he says. “The facility in Sparks also had 2,000 square feet of custom-built office space and laser-engraving space, where the company personalizes urns.

“I’m here for the same price it was going to cost me to stay in the smaller facility,” he says, noting that the long-term agreement he signed has escalation clauses that were fair. “It wasn’t a ‘move you in and the first year’s rent is low and then we’re going to sock it to you’ kind of deal.”

But, financing the move was not so simple. “We had a huge issue with getting the U.S. Small Business Administration loan. We needed to change banks and have the collateral for the loan be the house we were selling in Washington—something that had largely never been done.

“Rod helped me write and draft the documents for the Small Business Administration and for the bank. He made the problem go away. “What we’ve pulled off—with the great assistance of Rod and his team—is a wonderful accomplishment.”

Even with supply-side problems in 2011 caused by labor issues in China, “We still grew by 20 percent,” Schlicker says. “I attribute much of our success to the guidance we received from Rod.”

Jorgensen notes, “Most small businesses don’t have a board of directors or advisory board. I’m a sounding board.”

The Nevada Small Business Development Center offers free and confidential counseling services to small business owners and prospective small business owners. To find out more, contact Rod Jorgensen, (775) 784-4337 or rodj@unr.edu.
A nurse educator focuses her passion for women’s wellness

Lisa Mantkus, a registered nurse, had known she wanted to do more in our community to educate women about their health. But it wasn’t until she took the Nevada Small Business Development Center’s 13-week NxLeveL for Entrepreneurs training class that she zeroed in on her goals and mission.

“The class literally allowed me to become laser-focused on my vision and not fearful of what I was trying to do in our community,” Mantkus says. “It was not like any other class I’d ever taken.”

Mantkus had been working as a nurse educator for the past three years at Sierra Health Mart Pharmacy, a compounding pharmacy, with three locations: south Reno—where Mantkus has her office; downtown Reno and Incline Village; when she took the class last fall. She still works there, but after taking the NxLeveL class, she wanted to “change the world, one woman at a time.”

“The class was about ‘life’ educating versus ‘here’s your chapter, read it and you’ll be quizzed,’” she says. “They brought in speakers who have ‘been there done that’ in business: those who succeeded; those who struggled; those who failed, but picked themselves up and reinvented themselves.

“It was eye-opening for many of us in the class. And, they said, ‘We are here to support you.’”

Now, Mantkus consults with clients on women’s wellness and hormone replacement therapy. Following the consultation, which costs $125, she collaborates with Sierra Health Mart Pharmacy’s pharmacists and the patient’s doctor to develop a care plan.

“When women think about hormonal changes, they don’t necessarily think about perimenopause. They just think about the ‘Big M,’ menopause,” she says. “But perimenopausal symptoms can start as early as 10 to 15 years before menopause.

Perimenopause is the transition period prior to menopause in which women’s hormones are often out of balance. It can begin as early as a woman’s 30s. Menopause begins at an average age of 51 in the United States.

Women in perimenopause “deal with a lot of issues: emotional ups and downs, hot flashes, night sweats, feeling as if they’re going to jump out of their skin. They rage one moment, cry the next.”

Most women will try to seek help from their doctors, Mantkus says, but due to the volume of patients, doctors’ time with patients is often limited. Mantkus spends an hour with each patient.

“I look at each patient as the best murder mystery ever I’ve read, and I’m resolved to find out who did it, how they did it, and I’m going to catch them.” But she, notes, “This isn’t cookie cutter medicine. Everyone is different.”

Kathy Carrico, statewide training director for the Nevada Small Business Development Center, says that many people who own a business are in it alone. While their spouses may be supportive, they “don’t really get it.” NxLeveL instructors not only get it, they care.

Carrico says: “NxLevel. combines the technical side of business with the human side. Our instructors really care. The instructor is always someone who has been in business. This class is gold.”

To learn more about NxLeveL classes, contact Kathy Carrico, statewide training director, (775) 784-6879 or kcarrico@unr.edu; or visit nsbdc.org and click on the Education & Training tab.

Lisa Mantkus, RN, MEP-C, in her office at Sierra Health Mart Pharmacy in south Reno where she provides hormone and supplement counseling.

 NxLevel classes

NxLevel for Start-up Micro Businesses is the next NxLevel class offered by the Nevada Small Business Development Center. It begins May 9 at the Redfield Campus in south Reno. A micro business is defined as a business with fewer than five employees. Cost: $195 for the 15-week class, including books.

NxLevel for Entrepreneurs is offered in Reno and Las Vegas in spring and fall, as well as in other cities. The next class will be held in Las Vegas beginning May 14 at the Las Vegas Latin Chamber of Commerce. Cost: $195 for the 13-week class, including books.

To learn more about NxLevel and other businesses classes, contact Kathy Carrico, statewide training director, (775) 784-6879 or kcarrico@unr.edu; or visit nsbdc.org and click on the Education & Training tab.