

THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

Official Publication of the New River Valley Competitiveness Center
A Small Business Incubator

Yolanda Y. Hunter, Incubator Manager

December 2007 - January 2008

From the Manager's Desk:

The NRVCC welcomes Signs Direct. J.C. Adkins, owner, joined the Center in October 2007. Mr. Adkins is a third generation sign maker and brings over 20 years of experience to the trade. Signs Direct is a manufacturer of exterior sign products for local and national companies. Signs Direct produces a wide range of products including store front signs, pylon signs, channel lettering, electronic displays, retrofit systems, and a full service sign company.

The company has leased approximately 2300 square feet of office and light-manufacturing space in the Center, conducting day-to-day operations and manufacturing of signs. The Center is excited about having Signs Direct as its newest tenant. The company will continue to help increase the Center's visibility throughout the Region.

Signs Direct helps their clients in creating eye-popping impressions that become a key factor in the growth and success of their customers. For further information, please contact J.C. Adkins at 540-267-3477 or 866-315-3081.



J.C. Adkins

Considering Renting Office Space?

Someday all growing small businesses will be faced with the question of leasing versus buying office space. This question has many pros and cons. In order to make your decision easier, I would like to share key facts to consider when leasing office space as discussed in the About.com Guide.

With ever-changing U.S. office vacancy rates and stock markets, it is uncertain what the future may bring. A small business owner needs to carefully weigh their options when leasing office space. Here are a few reasons to consider leasing office space.

✓ **Prime Property:** An office space leasing option provides a business with the chance to rent in an area with a good location and high image. If your small business is dependent on location and image, such as service providers or retail establishments, the leasing option is much more affordable.

✓ **Free-up Working Capital:** With your money not tied up in real estate your business can respond to opportunities in the market. In addition, your ability to borrow funds will not be as limited as with buying office space.

✓ **More Time:** Any type of ownership comes with headaches. A leasing option affords the time and flexibility to focus solely on running your business.

INDUSTRY UPDATES

IRS Update November 7, 2007 — In a variation, an e-mail scam claims to come from the IRS and the Taxpayer Advocate Service (a genuine and independent organization within the IRS whose employees assist taxpayers with unresolved tax problems). The e-mail says that the recipient is eligible for a tax refund and directs the recipient to click on a link that leads to a fake IRS Web site. The IRS recommends that recipients do not click on links in, or open any attachments to, e-mails they receive that are unsolicited or that come from unknown sources-<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=170894,00.html>.

Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission has agreed to help Southwest Virginia businesses grow revenues and jobs through e-commerce and has approved a business assistance grant program for that purpose. Businesses located in the following areas are eligible for matching grant consideration: Bland, Bristol City, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Floyd, Galax City, Grayson, Lee, Norton City, Russell, Scott, and Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, Wythe, and all towns in these counties.

Opportunity Calling! Sell to State Agencies and Institutions. Small business products and services are actively being sought by Commonwealth of Virginia governmental and educational entities. Get the tools and training you need to take advantage of these opportunities from VDBA. Check out Selling to the Commonwealth at <http://www.dba.virginia.gov/mwbusinesses/default.asp>.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Free community wide financial literacy (Money Talkin') 2008 classes.

Classes are open to the public, and pre-registration is required. Classes taught by Dawn Barnes of the Virginia Cooperative Extension. Location is the Beans & Rice offices in Radford (325 West Main Street). Classes are from 5:30 to 8:30, and dinner is provided. Please contact Dawn Barnes to sign up: lbarnes@vt.edu or 745-9307 for further information.

2008 Schedule

January 7 & 14

April 14 & 21

February 12 & 19

May 8 & 15

March 6 & 13

June 17 & 24

Business Start-up Seminar – 12/18/07 and 01/15/08

Host: RU Business Technology Park. This is a one-time, 2 1/2 hour program designed to give the novice entrepreneur an opportunity to get vital information on how to get your business started. Topics to be discussed: business planning, financial planning, business entities, and contact information on where to get licenses, etc., and tax issues. Call 540-831-6056 to register. Hours: 2.50 Cost: \$15.



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February - March 2008

From the Manager's Desk:

The Perfect Answers to Real Questions

What are business incubators?

Business incubators nurture the development of entrepreneurial companies, helping them survive and grow during the start-up period, when they are most vulnerable. Business incubators provide their client companies with business support services and resources including management guidance, assistance with business planning, and help obtaining financing. Incubators usually also offer companies rental space with flexible leases, shared basic office services and access to equipment – all under one roof. The main goal of most incubation programs is to produce companies that create jobs and wealth in their communities. (NBIA, June 2004)

How do Incubators contribute to the local and regional economy?

Incubator graduates create jobs, revitalize neighborhoods and commercialize new technologies, thus strengthening local, regional and even national economies.

√NBIA estimates that North American incubator client and graduate companies have created about half a million jobs since 1980.

√Every 50 jobs created by an incubator client generates approximately 25 more jobs in the same community.

√Business incubators reduce the risk of small business failures. Historically, NBIA member incubators have reported that 87 percent of all firms that have graduated from their incubators are still in business.

How do business incubators differ from SBDCs?

The U.S. Small Business Administration administers the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) program to provide general business assistance to current and prospective small business owners. SBDCs (and similar programs) differ from business incubators in that they do not specifically target early-stage companies; they often serve small businesses at any stage of development. Some business incubators partner with local SBDCs and share management to avoid duplicating business assistance services in a region.

Customer Service: A Marketing Edge for Small Business

It's about survival! For many small businesses, delivering superior customer service isn't an extra benefit or an add-on, it's staying power. Small companies can't compete with industrial giants, retail superstores or mass marketers for advertising capital. Small businesses usually can't afford to undercut the big operations. But as a small business owner, you have a powerful marketing tool if you choose to use it, ultimate customer service.

Paul Levesque, author of *Customer Service Made Easy*, cites many small businesses still fail to deliver ultimate customer service, the one thing that can provide a competitive advantage. Small business owners need to understand how creating one-on-one relationships and making customers feel personally valued and appreciated is what gives their business a big differentiation from larger companies.

Remember there are two types of small businesses: one that has created a customer service culture and one that has not. Building a business around a customer service culture starts at the top with the owner. If the owner is impolite or thinks every customer is not to be trusted, the employees will take on the same mind-set as well. On the other hand, if the owner makes customer service the number one priority, personnel follows.

Paul Levesque suggests several skills for small businesses owners who deal with offensive or crabby customers:

- Create a culture of customer service; don't legislate it.
- Exceed customer expectations.
- Make the customer feel important or valued.
- Tailor the experience to fit the customer.
- Involve your staff in problem solving.

Tips For Improving Your Cash Inflow From Late Paying Customers

Here are five tips for eliminating those consistently past due entries you find in your accounts receivables report:

1. **Make sure you send your invoices on time, every time.**

Sometimes it's not the customers making cash flow problems for a business, it's the business itself. You benefit when you have a vendor who is lazy in billing you promptly. The longer he lets you keep your cash in your bank account the more interest you earn. However, each time you are late in invoicing your customers you're the one who is losing out because they pay you later than you had planned or needed.

2. **Take deposits or retainers when orders are taken.**

I find that quite a few small business owners are in a position to take a down payment from clients but they do not because doing so just hadn't occurred to them. How much is enough but not too much? Fifteen percent? Twenty-five percent? Fifty percent? If you have not done this before you may want to "test the waters" with various new customers to learn what price points are acceptable for your business.

3. **Have them pay by credit card immediately.**

While retail shopkeepers accept credit cards as a matter of course, small businesses that don't serve "store traffic" tend to do without such a payment facility. If you don't run a retail business the cost of establishing a credit card payment facility may be beneficial if it gives you the potential to increase the speed by which clients pay you.

Run a cost/benefit analysis with your financial planner. Make an approximate determination of how much of your receivables you would need to have clients pay by credit card to make adding this payment facility worth your while. Then, contact clients and tell them you're taking an informal poll to determine if they would be interested in paying by credit card. Remind them that they could earn frequent flyer miles or other credit card perks for their businesses or themselves.

4. **Offer discounts to customers who pay their bills quickly.**

Everybody recognizes that store discounts encourage shoppers to "buy now". The offer of a discount may work with some of your customers, too. If you have a customer who has been negligent in paying you on time, consider offering a discount of some sort if he pays you promptly and consistently.

5. **Make sure you know who your late paying customers are and if they persist in their lateness have them go on cash on delivery only.**

For those late paying customers who didn't accept your previous offers (to provide you with a deposit first, to pay by credit card or take you up on a bid to pay on time and earn a discounted invoice three times a year), you have one option left. Inform them that you will put them on a cash-on-delivery billing basis.

If they do not accept any of these proposals, you need to reassess whether you can afford to continue doing business with them. If a client of mine had such an experience with a customer of his, I'd question whether his customer's business was likely to remain viable for much longer and warn my client to be careful when extending credit to this customer. *Guy McPhail, CFA, CFP, is president of Zdenek Financial Planning, LLC.;www.zdenek.com.*

Calendar of Events & Announcements

Breakfast Briefing - Tuesday, February 12, 2008. Hosted by Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz at M'K's, Claytor Lake State Park Rd, Dublin, 8:00 am. The topic of the discussion will be "*Effective Employee Evaluations*." These informative seminars are designed to help you with some of the major issues affecting small business. Please RSVP to the Chamber by February 8, 2008 (540) 674-1991.

Meeting Rooms – Schedule your next business meeting or training event at the *NRV Competitiveness Center*. The Center offers the availability of conference and training space with seating capacity of 49 to 100 persons. To schedule a meeting, please call the Center office at 540-633-6730.

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April - May 2008

From the Manager's Desk:

John Jantsch is a veteran marketing coach, an award winning blogger, and author of Duct Tape Marketing: The World's Most Practical Small Business Marketing Guide who shares practical small business marketing solutions with his audience. Mr. Jantsch permits organizations to reprint his articles if the article is attributed to him. I would like to share one of his latest articles because I find educating your target market is one of the best ways to sell service or product.

Teaching is the best way to sell

Creating education based information products has never been easier.

You've heard it before, but it merits repeating – nobody likes to be sold to, but they do like to buy. The way people like to buy is find information and then slowly build trust with the provider of that information. Nothing sells like great educational content. If that's true then no one sells better than someone that teaches.

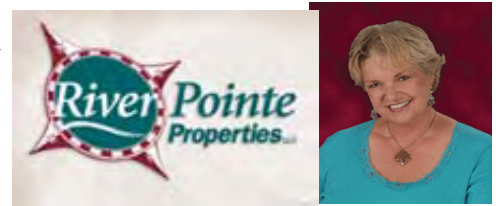
Think in terms of educating and informing a growing audience of prospects and your brand will become the brand of choice. (It doesn't hurt if you can entertain them a little in the process.)

Some idea starters

- You can create videos featuring you showing customers how to do something online.
- You can have your best customers tell their stories about how your service helped them.
- You can take your best presentations and create virtual copies that can be viewed anytime night or day.
- You can create a virtual tour of your offices featuring a message from the CEO.
- You can post the audio tip of the day to your blog.

NEW TENANTS MOVE INTO THE COMPETITIVENESS CENTER

The NRVCC welcomes River Point Properties LLC, joining the Center in January 2008. Pat Collins, owner, has worked successfully in the Real Estate industry serving in many real estate positions with small and nationally recognized companies. As a Broker/Owner, Pat has almost 35 years of experience in residential properties, new construction, land, and relocations in the New River Valley. She is positioned to help clients in the New River Valley consisting of the areas of Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Radford, Riner, Dublin, Claytor Lake, and the counties of Montgomery, Pulaski, Floyd, and Giles.



River Pointe Properties LLC leases approximately 200 square feet of office space in the Competitiveness Center, conducting day-to-day operations. The River Pointe Properties Team brings the know-how and professionalism to assist buyers in finding the best properties in the NEW RIVER VALLEY, whether you're a first-time homebuyer or someone looking for a specific lifestyle such as waterfront and golf course communities or retirement living. The Team is available to assist you through each step of the process of SELLING or BUYING property. For immediate service call (540) 731-1555 office or (540) 605-6605 cell or email Pat Collins at pat@patcollins.com.

The NRVCC welcomes Roberts Industries LLC. Matthew Roberts, owner, joined the Center in March 2008. Mr. Roberts' interest in knives began at an early age like most makers of knives. Roberts Industries is a manufacturer of knife products for intended usage and for the avid collector, and produces a wide range of products including Bowies & Fighter, Hunter, and Camp knives and is a proud USA manufacturer. Matt was awarded "Best New Maker" at the 2006 Atlanta Blade Show.



The company has leased approximately 1900 square feet of light manufacturing space in the Center, conducting business operations and manufacturing knives. The Center is excited about having Roberts Industries LLC as its newest tenant. Roberts Industries LLC continues to help the Center increase visibility throughout the Region. To view Roberts products visit www.robertsknives.com or send an email to admin@robertsknives.com for further information.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pulaski County wide free start-up Business Resource Entrepreneur Workshop (BREW) business sessions.

Host: Entrepreneur Coalition. **BREW** workshop classes are open to the public and are taught by New River Valley business professionals. Location is the Pulaski Elementary School, Pulaski, VA. Sessions are from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. These sessions are designed to give the beginner entrepreneur an opportunity to get vital information on how to get a business started. Please contact Beans & Rice to pre register at ebukey@beansandrice.org or (540) 980-4111.

BREW Workshop Schedule

04-08-08	Business Start-up
05-13-08	Writing a Business Plan
06-10-08	Marketing
07-08-08	Legal Considerations
08-12-08	Meet the Lender and Show me the Money
09-09-08	Financial Record Keeping
10-14-08	Business Taxes
11-11-08	Technology and E-commerce

Meeting Rooms – Schedule your next business meeting or training event at the **NRV Competitiveness Center**. The Center offers the availability of conference and training space with seating capacity of 49 to 100 persons. To schedule a meeting, please call the Center office at 540-633-6730.

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June - July 2008

From the Manager's Desk:

Competitiveness Center Program Works With External Clients

Business incubation programs catalyze the process of starting and growing companies by providing entrepreneurs with the expertise, networks and tools they need to make their ventures successful.

Several things I have come to understand, most start-ups need assistance in preparing a formal business plan, forming networks and tools to market a business, and generating an infusion of cash to get their businesses off on the right foot. This is why it's important for Small Business Incubators to team up with local Small Business Development Centers (SBDC's), private economic development partnerships, and officials from towns and counties to create a local environment that stimulates balanced economic growth through job creation and business assistance.

Recently, the Competitiveness Center partnered with the Entrepreneur Coalition to nurture start-up firms. A micro-enterprise collaborative who wishes to retain and foster growth of existing businesses, attract new businesses, and bring career opportunities to local residents by providing training courses and create a way to increase local entrepreneurs' chance of securing capital through private and federal programs.

You can attend the Entrepreneur Coalition's series of "Business Resource and Entrepreneur Workshops" (BREW) on the second Tuesday of each month. The free classes are held at Pulaski Elementary School (Center Entrance, Route 11 on Morehead Lane, Pulaski, Virginia).

Small Business Funding Options

Funding opportunities are often determined by small business growth status. Below are a few of the most popular funding sources, including small business loans, SBA loans, bank loans, venture capital investors and angel investors. Determining the best source for your company isn't always easy. You need to graph your whole business plan and presentation to the source that is most likely to fund your project. So choose wisely, and be ready to change direction at any time.

A quick summary of small business growth funding alternatives you may be looking at are listed for your review. However, there are no hard and fast rules. The best funding option for your company is often the one you can obtain. Please visit <http://www.businessplanmaster.com/small-business-growth.html>.

	<u>Bootstrap</u>	<u>Angels</u>	<u>VC</u>	<u>SBA</u>	<u>Leasing</u>	<u>Grants</u>	<u>Alternative</u>
Pre-Start Up	YES	YES				YES	
Start Up	YES	YES	YES	IFFY	YES		YES
Established			YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Buy Out				YES	YES		YES

Competitiveness Center Opens Arms to Out-of-Market Companies

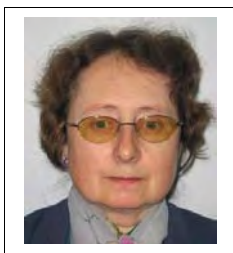
The incubation industry has evolved immensely over the past 20 years due to globalization. There are approximately 5,000 business incubators around the world, and many incubator managers are working to help clients access large regional and global markets.

Expanding incubation's reach is vital to the growth of companies, particularly in nations whose small internal markets require they begin selling outside their national boundaries.

Today, more companies in the United States must position themselves at an early stage to sell internationally. Companies may need to acquire technologies or license their technologies outside their domestic area. Firms need networks that can open the right doors to contacts, assisting companies with cultural and legal environment norms in those non-domestic locations.

The Competitiveness Center was visited by the Business and Economic Development Delegation from the County of Kent, England, sponsored by the newly created International Reciprocal Soft Landings Network Program. This is a joint venture created by the NRV Economic Development Alliance and the Canterbury Enterprise Hub of Southeast England Development.

Harriet Anderson, Owner and President of Smiling Bulldog Enterprises, LLC represented her company at a meeting at the INN at Virginia Tech on April 30, 2008. As part of a delegation from the New River Valley Competitiveness Center, Harriet presented a product idea to representatives from the Business and Economic Development Delegation from the County of Kent and the Canterbury Enterprise Hub. She will work with David Butler and others to set up samples for licensed sports products to be marketed in the UK and other parts of Europe.



The NRV Development Corporation served as co-host to Olfaction Research Ltd, a delegate of the County of Kent and the Canterbury Enterprise Hub. Dr. Jenny Oliver with Olfaction

Research Ltd, is in the process of developing an instrument that can be used to evaluate patient-responses to a range of odors, including both perception levels and cognitive ability. It will assist in the diagnosis of early-stage neurodegenerative disease, in particular disorders such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's. Dr. Oliver presented her company to several local NRV companies during her visit in the Valley.

The primary purpose of this trip was to initiate a new program of business support and exchange between the Commonwealth of Virginia and partner companies in an exciting and growing market in England and Europe. The Center would like to thank David Denny, David Butler, and the International Reciprocal Soft Landings Network for introducing non-domestic firms to New River Valley markets.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BREW Workshops

√06-10-08 Marketing

√07-08-08 Legal Considerations

√08-12-08 Meet the Lender and Show Me the Money

To register, call Beans & Rice at (540) 980-4111, the Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce at (540) 674-1991, or register electronically at <http://bac.asp.radford.edu/SBDC/>.

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August - September 2008

From the Manager's Desk:

Two Important Words

There are two important words that are worth their weight in gold. Unfortunately, some business owners or marketers never say them to their clients or they don't speak them nearly enough. I guess you are wondering what those two words are. "Thank you!" When was the last time your customer heard you actually say thank you?

The reason I bring this up is because as business owners we get so busy trying to develop the company by growing the customer base, we fail to thank all of our customers for their business. So make it a point to send a short note or email and say "Thank you! I appreciate your business," a thank you with no ulterior motives and no sales pitches. A note that makes your customers feel important and that their business matters and is not being taken for granted. Maybe this will stir up the customer who has not purchased any of your services or products for some time.

This act of kindness and strategy will be worth its weight in gold!

Competitiveness Center Incubator Tenant Visits the UK

Northern Ireland Trip: A Journey into Business Future and Personal Past

When I was asked to represent my company, Smiling Bulldog Enterprises®, with a delegation from the New River Valley traveling to Northern Ireland, the answer "no" wasn't an option! While I did not have a passport, that small stumbling block was remedied by a call to Congressman Rick Boucher's office. With the help of his staff, my passport was processed and in my hands within two weeks.

The week-long trip turned out to be not just a business trip, but a real personal journey as well. I was able to make contacts and friends of a lifetime in a country that can truly claim an ancestral link to thousands of Southwest Virginia families including my own.

Supported by the New River Valley Economic Development Alliance and sponsored by LEDCOM (Larne Enterprise Development Company), our group arrived in Belfast, Northern Ireland on Saturday, June 21st. After flying through five time zones, the weekend was mostly a time of rest and opportunity to sightsee along the Northern Irish coast. A good thing too...on Monday, the director of LEDCOM, Ken Nelson, along with David Denny of the NRV Economic Development Alliance, had full schedules of appointments for us with diverse business representatives and entrepreneurs all over the area.

The real purpose of our trip could likely be called a trade mission. We were there to explore opportunities not only to market our products overseas, but to set up a true exchange of products, ideas, and even locations. LEDCOM is a leader in the Northern Ireland Enterprise system which supports and cultivates the growth of small business in that region of the British Isles. In less than twenty years, as a true business incubator, LEDCOM has sponsored over 500 small businesses growing in the process from one building to two business park complexes.

As a representative of Smiling Bulldog Enterprises®, my purpose was to propose potential sports-related items to marketing agents for both local soccer clubs and the national football association. Futbol, or soccer as we call it, is truly an international sport and fans are dedicated to their local clubs with the enthusiasm we have for our own high school football teams.

I actually represented a second company as well. Country Roads Collection™ will market theme-based home décor items using local artists' and photographers' work. The idea of using artistic works and photographs from Northern Ireland on various product lines was met with much enthusiasm and genuine interest among the people that I met.

If my purpose was to exchange business ideas and explore marketing opportunities in Northern Ireland, the third, less tangible, reason for my inclusion in the New River Valley delegation, has to do with a vision based on the history of Virginia, and certainly the entire United States.

In 2005, Delegate Benny Keister proposed the idea of promoting the Wilderness Road as a tourism initiative in Virginia. That idea was ultimately adopted and developed by the Virginia Tourism Authority and continues now under a non-profit group known as The Wilderness Road- Virginia's Heritage Migration Route. When St. Patrick's Day comes around each March, just about everyone wants to be a little bit "Irish". But the interesting thing is that while millions of Americans can claim Irish relatives, a good portion of that Irish background is Ulster-Scots- so named from the region of Northern Ireland from which the first immigration occurred from the early 1700's through about 1820. Those Scots-Irish ancestors were the ones who traveled the Wilderness Road prominently in this state to lands south and west. They brought their crafts, their culture, their music, their surnames that we claim as our own -especially in Southwest Virginia.

Several of my appointments were with representatives of the Ulster-Scots Agency along with people in the film industry and tourism centers who are excited about the cultivation of the links between the two continents. While many of us have spent countless hours discovering the lands from which our ancestors came, the Ulster-Scots are most interested to find where their ancestors went! The idea of a documentary that tells the story from both sides of the Atlantic was well received as was the development of "Sister Cities" along the Wilderness Road.

Northern Ireland was welcoming in so many ways: It is truly "emerald" in color (it stays green all year and a drive through the country looks like a backroads trip anywhere in the New River Valley), has a climate that could only be called "interesting", a friendly population that seems to genuinely like Americans and is a land filled with history that most of us could only read about a few years ago. Cities like Belfast seem dedicated to becoming a safe and visitor-friendly place with ancient buildings that are at home with modern hotels and restaurants. A side note that was really exciting- according to several sources- an American businessman and other investors are planning to rebuild the *Titanic*- in the Belfast berth where she was built nearly 100 years ago. The full-scale replica ship may never be launched, but she will be a destination nonetheless as a hotel, office complex and tourism center.

Companies like LEDCOM are leading the way to business and industrial development in Northern Ireland that will grow a dynamic and truly global-based economy in that region. It was quite an experience to be a part of this business trip- a journey of a lifetime for me and ultimately, for companies in the New River Valley.

Harriet Anderson
Smiling Bulldog Enterprises®, LLC

Zambia Delegates Visit the NRV Competitiveness Center

The New River Valley Competitiveness Center for the first time hosted delegates from Zambia and it was a pure delight. They were the most attentive, interested and educated delegates who represented vocational, technological, and entrepreneurial training; individuals who were fascinated with sharing best practices for small business incubators.

It was a week of intense meetings – the delegates met with incubator managers and representatives from New Century Venture Center, Salem, Virginia; the Jacksonville Center, Floyd, Virginia; and the Southwest Regional Enterprise Center at Crossroads Institute, Galax, Virginia; to gain understanding of managing an incubator. The Zambians had appointments with Woodwork Restoration & Remodeling and Trenia B and Company, Competitiveness Center graduates, to discuss the Center's role in their business development and success. Residing incubator tenants Safe Water, Luxine Inc., Signs Direct, and Smiling Bulldog Enterprises shared with the delegates the advantages and disadvantages of being located within a small business incubator while developing a startup business. Incubator Managers and representatives, incubator graduates and tenants, were content that the whole week was a success. This visit was worthwhile and could spawn at least one (if not more) business exchanges.



Meeting Rooms

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For those of you who are not aware, the Microsoft small business center provides wonderful resource tools for startup and small business owners. The Learning Center provides resources to solve your business needs. The Learning Center site provides business articles & insights; software tips, free webcasts and many other business resources at <http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/resources/overview.aspx>. The Microsoft Learning Center is designed to help existing small businesses.

If you are thinking of starting a new business, the Microsoft Startup Center is ideal for you. As you work through the Startup Center, you will be able to add items you need to take care of for your business to create a personalized to-do list. The Center provides free step-by-step information, what you need to get things done, and wonderful Microsoft products to aid your new venture. You can find all these resources at <http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/startup-toolkit/>.

NEW TENANTS

Katrina Gravely, North South Partners Inc.

Katrina Gravely, Esquire private law practice, joined the Center in September 2008. North South Partners Inc., featuring all natural beef, began operations in 2003 providing all natural calves and weighted steers to branded beef companies. They have expanded to their value added capacity in 2005 by adding Premium All Natural Beef products which takes their product from "the gate to the plate" for the consumers.

North South Partners Inc. leases approximately 200 square feet of office space in the Competitiveness Center, conducting day-to-day operations. North South Partners Inc. brings the know-how and professionalism to assist any beef buyer. Expansion and growth have been their primary focus and the company looks forward to providing their clients with the best beef possible for their families and customers. North South Partners Inc. offers old fashioned customer service to restaurants, deli's and individuals and ensures that their custom beef orders are simply the best.

For immediate service call their office at (540) 267-3470 or email Katrina Gravely at northsouthpartnersinc@hotmail.com or info@premiumallnaturalbeef.com.

Blue Ridge Satellite

Blue Ridge Satellite also joined the Center in September 2008. Greg McCracken, Owner/Installer, started the business as a home-based business in December 2003, providing Dish Network as the sole satellite system. During the next several years, the company continued focusing on Dish Network as their primary product and numerous successes were achieved. In 2006, the company added Wildblue Satellite Internet to their product line and Tracy Shelton was brought in as a partner. During 2007, Blue Ridge Satellite established an office and brought on DIRECTV to their product line. As the company continues to expand in 2008, Blue Ridge Satellite will continue to position itself in the commercial market place.

The company has leased approximately 240 square feet of office space in the Center, conducting business operations. Blue Ridge Satellite continues to help the Center increase visibility throughout the Region. To learn more about the products provided by Blue Ridge Satellite, please contact Tracy Shelton or Greg McCracken at (540) 633-0797 or send an email to blueridgesatellite@wildblue.net for further information.

SPACE FOR RENT

The Competitiveness Center has space available for rent, with offices as small as 165 square feet to industrial bays that are approximately 2,000 square feet. Monthly rent could be as low as \$190.00 for the smallest office. All tenants have access to telephone services, office equipment, the Internet, conference and training rooms, resource library, and business assistance as part of their lease. Also included in the monthly rent are all utilities, including water, sewer, climate controlled space, convenient parking, and a large kitchen that is furnished with a refrigerator and microwave.

If you are looking for a space to grow your small business, or if you want to find out more about the Competitiveness Center, please contact Yolanda Hunter at (540) 633-6730 or by email at yhunter@nrvc.org. The management staff is extremely proud of this facility and its wonderful location, and would like the opportunity to show you around.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pulaski County Free Start-Up Business Resource Entrepreneur Workshop (BREW) Business Sessions. Host: Entrepreneur Coalition. BREW workshop classes are open to the public and are taught by New River Valley business professionals. Location is the Pulaski Elementary School, Pulaski, VA. Sessions are from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. These sessions are designed to give the beginner entrepreneur an opportunity to get vital information on how to get a business started. Please contact Beans & Rice to pre-register at ebukey@beansandrice.org or (540) 980-4111.

BREW Workshop

- 10-14-08 - Business Taxes
- 11-11-08 - Technology and E-commerce

VBIA Annual Conference - to be held on November 17 & 18 at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel, Staunton, Virginia. The conference will focus on the four keys to incubator success and details can be found at http://www.vbia.org/html/conf_program.html.

Entrepreneur Express: Moving Your Business Forward - The Entrepreneur Express Workshops are a series of free workshops throughout Southwest Virginia that offer hands on lectures and exercises covering key elements of business practice, run by successful practitioners. Please visit <http://www.vastartup.org> for a schedule of the ongoing series of workshops and sponsors in Southwest Virginia. Pre-registration is required.

Meeting Rooms – Schedule your next business meeting or training event at the NRV Competitiveness Center. The Center offers the availability of conference and training space with seating capacity of 49 to 100 persons. To schedule a meeting, please call the Center office at (540) 633-6730.

For Competitiveness Center information contact:

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