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EMPLOYMENT QUARTERLY

SBDC course aims at helping entrepreneurs grow

Monday, August 6, 2007

BY WILLIAM JASON
STAFF REPORTER

SANTA ROSA – An entrepreneurship course may sound like an activity for novices, but at least one seasoned small-business owner said he reaped the benefits of spending a little time in the classroom.

Santa Rosa jeweler Tim Hassler had been manufacturing and selling wholesale jewelry for 10 years when he learned that the Redwood Empire Small Business Development Center at Santa Rosa Junior College offered a course on growing and managing a business.

“I had already been in business and wanted to make some changes,” Mr. Hassler said.

He wanted to shift from being solely a manufacturer and wholesaler to a retailer and was poised to move his store, Timothy Patrick Jewelers, from a side street to a prominent corner in the Courthouse Square district of downtown Santa Rosa.

He enrolled in the course, offered through the national NxLevel Education Foundation, where he developed a business plan to support his goal of tripling gross sales.

“It kind of helped me build an outline for my business to grow,” Mr. Hassler said. “I got to work with a lot of people who had been in the local business community for decades who were now retiring and sharing their

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experience.”

Six years after taking the course, Mr. Hassler said he has reached 90 percent of his revenue goal.

Mr. Hassler’s experience is not unusual, according to Lorraine DuVernay, director of the Redwood Empire SBDC. According to Ms. DuVernay, the average business owner increases revenue by 32 percent within a year after taking the course. Businesses that start the course with less than \$200,000 in gross sales increase that figure by an average of 200 percent within a year.

Mr. Hassler said the course helps entrepreneurs improve their business practices before they expand too quickly based on an unsustainable model.

“A lot of businesses decide they want to grow, and it’s not well planned and often, that’s a disaster for them,” Ms. DuVernay said.

Business owners meet for 12, three-hour sessions to learn from NxLevel-certified teachers and guest speakers, including successful local business owners. Topics include planning and research, marketing, basic finance, cash-flow management and legal structure.

“Even for people who have been in business for a long time, it teaches them the art of being a better businessperson,” Ms. DuVernay said.

The next course, co-sponsored by the City of Santa Rosa, begins Aug. 29. A free orientation will be held Wednesday, Aug. 8 from 6 to 7 p.m. at the SBDC conference room, 421 10th St. in Santa Rosa. For more information visit www.santarosa.edu/sbdc or call 707-524-1776.

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