



SBDC At SIUE Helps Small Businesses Survive, Thrive In Uncertain Times

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE – Small, locally-owned businesses are among the entities hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closures. To support its small business clients, the Illinois Small Business Development Center for the Metro East (SBDC) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville quickly shifted its focus to providing COVID-19 resources, specifically funding-based, and helping businesses survive and pivot during the unprecedented pandemic.

“The Illinois SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE is here to help Illinois businesses find creative solutions to the present challenges and ways to survive and thrive in these uncertain times,” said SBDC Director Jo Ann DiMaggio May.

The SBDC has assisted small businesses by helping with loan and grant applications, such as the Small Business Administration’s Economic Injury Disaster Loan and Paycheck Protection Program. Additionally, May and her team have placed significant focus on helping businesses pivot and find new ways to reach customers and maintain profitability. After moving its own services online, the SBDC has supported businesses in implementing more online and virtual platforms to improve efficiencies and be more profitable in the long term.

One such business that experienced firsthand the benefit of conducting business online was Unwrap You with Coach Melody. SIUE School of Business alumna Melody McClellan, ‘93, has worked with the SBDC since 2015 to grow her business focused on creating and implementing workplace wellness and youth wellness and life skills programs.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, much of McClellan’s business was conducted face-to-face at local businesses and schools. But when state-mandated closures delayed or canceled 18 of her contracts, McClellan didn’t give up. She began working seven days a week, posting health tips online about nutrition, self-care, mindfulness and avoiding the “COVID-15.” As a result, McClellan gained 30 new clients from across the country with whom she can work via Zoom and other online platforms.

“After going from my best quarter to my worst, my business has bounced back tremendously,” said McClellan. “COVID-19 is helping people begin to understand wellness and the importance of eating right and having a healthy lifestyle. They’re listening now, which is the silver lining.”

While the learning curve for shifting their businesses online can be steep for some, McClellan is a prime example of how a virtual business strategy can help small business owners during uncertain times.

“This is a new way of doing business,” added McClellan. “I can be in California in the morning and Colorado in the afternoon without ever having to step foot on a plane.”

The Illinois SBDC for the Metro East assists start-up ventures and existing businesses headquartered in the nine-county region of Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Washington, Monroe and Randolph. It is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and SIUE as a service to Illinois small businesses.

By aiding entrepreneurs and companies in defining their path to success, the SBDC network positively impacts the Metro East by strengthening the business community, creating and retaining new jobs and encouraging new investment. It enhances the region's economic interests by providing one-stop assistance to individuals by means of counseling, training, research and advocacy for new ventures and existing small businesses. When appropriate, the SBDC strives to affiliate its ties to the region to support the goals and objectives of both the SIUE School of Business and the University at large.

To learn about the SBDC, contact the IL SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE at 618-650-2929.