

# **Fusion Gates' Persistence Plus SBDC expertise opens gate to product rollout**

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**EDWARDSVILLE** - Edwardsville resident and business owner Donna Potter speaks from experience. Years of overcoming entrepreneurial-related challenges are what ultimately led to the launch of her business, Fusion Gates LLC.

In a previous life, Potter was a long-time marketing and advertising executive for a Fortune 500 company, and later a stay-at-home mom for her four kids and two dogs. Potter reentered the workforce eight years ago to pursue her passion as an entrepreneur and inventor.

As a completely female-staffed firm, Fusion Gates manufactures a premium safety gate that allows customers to customize its look, while keeping their four-legged family members safe and their belongings intact.

The June 2015 rollout of Fusion Gates' first product, says Potter, was a celebration of nearly a decade of designing and redesigning her prototype, all the while learning every nuance of the manufacturing process.

"We're still figuring it out," said Potter, a winner of several inventor-specific awards including The Dallas Marketing Center's *The Next Best Thing* competition, Washington University's *Ideabounce* competition and the SIUE Entrepreneurship Center's *Challenge Award*.

"Everyone has a different pet story," Potter stated. "Our product and its versatility fit beautifully into that story and into the look of a home as well. There's the teeny dog, who needs to stay out of your master bedroom. There's the active dog, who wants to explore the rest of your house. There are the cats and dogs you need to keep apart from each other when you're not at home. I love my dogs to death, but they're mischievous when left alone."

Potter's path overlapped with the Illinois Metro East Small Business Development Center seven years ago via SIUE's Entrepreneurship Center (EC). SBDC Director Patrick McKeehan and former graduate assistant Luther Cameron assisted Potter with helpful resources, professional connections, and business plan support, as did former EC Director Kristine Jardine Polo.

"I first interacted with the Entrepreneurship Center after hearing a panel of successful entrepreneurs discuss their business plans and the helpful resources they tapped into along the way," she said. "Through the years, my product has evolved in ways I never could have imagined or predicted. It was great to know that the SBDC at SIUE was always there for me, to keep me on track and instill the confidence I needed to keep going."

Potter plans to return to the SIUE's International Trade Center for additional expertise on exporting her product, which is now available at [fusiongates.com](http://fusiongates.com). The 36-inch-tall, scratch-resistant dog gate, which sells for \$299, is made from two sheets of polycarbonate and framed in durable, lightweight aluminum with optional aluminum-framed extensions that fit the gate securely to any doorway widths up to 61 inches.

McKeehan praises Potter for having the perseverance and passion to work through numerous challenges and production setbacks to fulfill her entrepreneurial dream.

“Donna is an inspiration to anyone struggling to create a viable product or service while launching a new business enterprise,” said McKeehan. “Our SBDC would love to assist more entrepreneurs in our region with her focus and desire to succeed.”

Illinois [Metro East SBDC](#) works directly with entrepreneurs and small business owners located in the nine-county Metro East region of Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Washington, Monroe and Randolph. It is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) as a service to the region's entrepreneurial and business community

The Illinois SBDC Network provides one-stop assistance to individuals by means of counseling, training, research and advocacy for new ventures and existing small businesses. As a key member of this Network, the Illinois Metro East SBDC delivers these important services to its clients while supporting the goals and objectives of both the [SIUE School of Business](#) and the University at large. To learn how these no-cost services may help your small business, contact the Illinois Metro East SBDC at [\(618\) 650-2929](tel:6186502929) or [sbdcwdw@gmail.com](mailto:sbdcwdw@gmail.com).