



Tri-Lakes incubator launching new program to boost businesses

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Small businesses can become successful businesses on their own. But it doesn't hurt to have someone help point the way.

The Tri-Lakes Business Incubator, the 4-year-old nonprofit that supports economic development and small business growth in the Tri-Lakes communities of Monument, Palmer Lake and Woodmoor north of Colorado Springs, will introduce a counseling, training and mentoring program this month to help jump-start fledgling businesses and entrepreneurs who are incubator members.

About 15 to 20 area business people have volunteered to act as counselors and offer their expertise to incubator members, said Heather McEntee, the Tri-Lakes Business Incubator's business manager. Those business people currently work in conjunction with groups such as the Colorado Springs Small Business Development Center and the Springs chapter of SCORE (Service Corp. of Retired Executives).

Through a series of one-on-one meetings, classes, workshops and training sessions, the volunteers will offer advice on finances, legal matters and marketing, among other topics, she said. A counselor might help a startup company improve its business plan, create a budget or decide how it should be legally incorporated.

Sure, the same type of information might be available via self-help books, the Internet or watching business experts on television. But a hands-on experience can be far more instructive, McEntee said.

"You have people who can actually teach you about your business — somebody you can interact with and ask questions of," she said. "It's hard to ask questions of a book."

The Colorado Springs Small Business Development Center also offers counseling and mentoring, although it's on an as-needed basis, McEntee said. Participants in the Tri-Lakes Business Incubator program, however, will be required to engage in counseling sessions and other activities that will earn them points toward staying in the program each year, McEntee said. The program costs \$15 a month, although participants can opt out at any time.



Tri-Lakes participants also will have the opportunity to lease low-cost office space in a building owned by incubator founder Alison Brown; their \$15 monthly program fee would be included in their rent. Even if participants don't lease office space, they'll have access to mailboxes and business services in the building, where they also can rent a conference room.

Brown bought the building in the early 1990s and moved her then-small company there from her Woodmoor home; her company, Navsys Corp., has grown into a major developer of Global Positioning System technology and had more than \$6 million in revenue in 2010.

"Hopefully, people would move in here because they're ready to have employees," McEntee said.

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