



Mentors play large role in job creation

Last week, I was one of a group who met with Marie Johns, deputy administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration. She visited the SBA office in Madison to promote entrepreneurship and discuss the important role that SBA organizations offer as mentors.

Johns noted that many people think of the SBA in terms of loans, but the most vital work is done before going to the bank. She recollected starting a small business and having no assistance from a mentor. "I wish that I had talked to someone first, because it was such an isolating experience. Entrepreneurs need to have help from someone who is well-trained and doesn't have an emotional connection," she noted.

As a first step, entrepreneurs should find a mentor and obtain counseling.

The SBA offers free resources and services to support small-business owners. These include SCORE, Small Business Development Centers, Women's Business Centers, and Minority Business Development Centers. Many of these resources have offices at the Business and Manufacturing Center at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College in Green Bay.

Johns emphasized that each group has a distinct purpose and is important to growing small businesses. "The challenge is to tell our story and let entrepreneurs know what we do," she said. "There is a synergy among us, and we all have a role in the process of helping entrepreneurs."

She noted the importance of writing a strong business plan that will support the request for a loan. Resource partners help with this to make sure that there is a clear road map before proceeding. As a result, businesses that are created will have a much higher success rate than the 50 percent average that will fail after five years.

By providing advice and guidance for no personal gain, mentors play a big part in job creation. Johns said the SBA is one of the most successful government groups. "Funding

provided to the SBA is multiplied many times over by its effectiveness in growing small businesses. We are one of the best investments that we can make," Johns noted.

Later in the day in Milwaukee, Johns announced a new program for young entrepreneurs: the Start Young Initiative, a program that will focus on business ownership as well as technical training. "Young entrepreneurs are looking to entrepreneurship as a way to create jobs for themselves and others. As young people enter trades, we need to help them take risks and strike out on their own," Johns remarked.

With the number of programs available, Johns stressed the importance of sharing ideas and making it easier for entrepreneurs to find the help they need. To that end, www.businessusa.gov is being created as a first step in the journey. The website is scheduled to debut in January and is a multiyear effort to bring together information from all of the various government programs.

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