

SLT providing bridge for businesses to be successful

By Kathryn Reed



Start-up mode is stressful in any business, but especially when you don't want your boss to know about it. That's the situation one South Lake Tahoe couple finds themselves in as they are about to branch out on their own.

To get ready for a spring roll out the couple used the city's TIES program. TIES, or Tahoe Inventors Entrepreneur Services, has several components – coaching, relocation, business loans, website design, business plans and more.

“(They) are still in the process of starting their company. They've come a long way since they started with us. They still have a long way to go. For our part, we've helped map out a reasonable road to success, but it's their sweat and persistence that will make it happen. It's a daunting task to start a company, and I daresay they are a little bit stressed out right in the middle of it,” Jim Mikles of Golden Capital Network said of the couple.

Golden Capital Network is one of the consultants the city contracts with to provide the services.

All of the money in the program is from grants. None is from the general fund. The city tries to use local businesses to provide the services.

The first \$300,000 grant for coaching came three years ago.

About 30 people are in the program today.

It's not just about people starting a business. These programs are for people in all phases. For some of the assistance income eligibility guidelines need to be met, but most people in town qualify.

"Before you go under, before you go into default we can be that bridge. We can make a difference," Nancy Kerry, a TIES adviser for the city, said. She also said to let the city determine eligibility and to not assume you don't qualify.

Karen Estes, who owns Simple Tahoe Weddings, participated in the program a couple years ago.

"We realized my website was outdated. I wanted it to be hip, simple and easy to navigate," Estes said.

Grants the city secured paid for her website. She said the site is making her business even more successful.

Kerry said it's not the city's job to solve people's problems, but it can give them direction

"We want people to succeed. It's advice and information. It's linking you to the right sources," Kerry said.

Through TIES workshops are offered on how to keep costs low, becoming green, being an effective leader, making sure employees represent your business appropriately, networking, cross-promotional ideas, and social media.

Information discussed in the one-on-one sessions is confidential.

Business loans are what are called micro-loans because they are small, the business must have five or fewer employees, and the business is considered low income or is creating jobs for low-income people. Average loans are \$25,000.

The money comes from the state. As people repay their loans, then more money is available for the next person in need.

This is a small component of the TIES program because fewer people qualify. Ten open loans exist today.

“The bottom line is the city is a business. We need business in the community to be successful for us to be successful,” said Gene Palazzo, one of the city’s TIES advisers.

For more information, call (530) 542.6044 or (530) 542.6043.