



"Professional Guidance for Business Growth"

June 15, 2015

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Spotlight on Success – El Refugio Food Market

After years of working for others, Sandra and Ignacio Ortega dreamed of opening a neighborhood Mexican grocery store. That dream became a reality when El Refugio Food Market opened in Lansing in January. The couple were no strangers to the business; Mrs. Ortega had 20 years of experience, including management, at a similar local business. Mr. Ortega founded and ran his own landscaping business for years.

Ortega said, "We could not have accomplished everything we did without the assistance and guidance of the **Illinois Small Business Development Center at Governor's State University**. They were instrumental in helping develop our business plan and obtaining financing. It also helped tremendously that they spoke Spanish and understood the culture." The **SBDC at GSU** continues to work with the Ortega's on marketing, pricing, and cash flow management. We look forward to their success and continued growth for years to come.

Priscilla Cordero, Director at the **SBDC at GSU** added, "The business is locally-owned and the owners could not be more committed to the community. They have a good selection of product, produce and meat and the hot items for sale such as carnitas and tamales are amazing! Try their guacamole too! Overall, a great local, authentic Mexican grocery store that is a gem in the community."

El Refugio Food Market is located at 3315 Ridge Rd, Lansing, IL 60438. You can call them at (708) 858-8186.

SBDC's In The News – Veteran Entrepreneur Still Relies on SBDC

Not all of the people who come to the Illinois Small Business Development Center at Southern Illinois University Carbondale are new to the world of business. Mark Robinson's first foray into business ownership came while he was still in high school. Through the

years, he's owned a number of businesses, including an army surplus store, a bicycle shop and a limousine company. But in the late 1990s, he conceived "Bus to Chicago" and the SBDC was there to help. That enabled Robinson to open his niche business in 2011. The initial plan was to offer SIU students from the Chicago area an affordable way to travel back and forth between the university and their hometown. But, the company now provides rides to anyone between Carbondale and the Windy City and also offers charter bus service.

"We're the only bus service that does what it does from Carbondale to Chicago," Robinson said.

Robinson provides transportation to Chicago via bus about 25 weekends annually and runs a van route on less popular weekends. He said the company prides itself on being consistently on time and that "people seem really happy" with the service he provides. He emphasizes personal service, answering the phone himself when people call rather than using a call center like many popular mass transportation companies do, he said. Robinson actually has about 28 years of experience in the transportation industry, at one time owning a Greyhound bus station, which he later sold.

"I'm proud to see that all of my businesses still exist," he said. "As long as you can make a living while doing the business you enjoy, the payout is at the end."

Despite Robinson's previous business successes and his experience, establishing Bus to Chicago wasn't easy. His first major obstacle was finding financing. Many bankers were unwilling to take a chance on such a new concept.

"I tried traditional financing and they just weren't interested – not even close to being interested," Robinson said.

Instead of giving up, Robinson contacted the SBDC. There, he got help revising and improving his business plan and in finding alternative funding through the Champion Community Investments program. Since that time, he's sought the expertise available at the center for other questions and needs and said he highly recommends the SBDC to other prospective and expanding business owners.

"I like to build things and see how they grow. There is no better way to see how something works or grows than to start a new business," Robinson said.

While Robinson encourages others to pursue their business ownership dreams and do it wisely by consulting the experts at the SBDC, he also warns aspiring owners "to avoid doing it for the money" but rather, to do something they enjoy doing, regardless of how profitable it is. He said business ownership is a big learning experience and the challenges for him have been many, including everyday maintenance and time constraints. He said he has made it a priority though to assure his vehicles are well-maintained and up-to-date for the safety and comfort of riders.

He continues to look for ways to improve Bus to Chicago and plans in the future to provide outlets on the bus, install better Wi-Fi and add graphics to the bus exteriors. As his business grows and thrives, Robinson said he'll return to the SBDC for sound guidance and in seeking assistance in securing financing.

The Illinois Small Business Development Center/International Trade Center is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and hosted by Southern Illinois

University Carbondale. For more information about the SBDC or the numerous services it provides to new and growing businesses, contact Robyn Laur Russell at rrussell@biz.siu.edu or 618-536-2424

Please click on [Veteran entrepreneur still relies on SBDC](#) for the full story that recently appeared in "The Southern Illinoisan".

Maximizing Neoserra - Marie and Trevor Covering for Tom Becker

Tom Becker will be out of the office from 6/15/15 – 7/1/15. Please call Marie Dumas at 312/814-3557 or Trevor Lawson at 217/473-4864 with any questions or issues with Neoserra.

Basic Neoserra Training Offered on 7/22/16 - This class will be aimed at those new to, or learning, the Neoserra system. This webinar will be hosted by Colette Williams of Outreach Systems and will last approximately 90 minutes.

Valued Resources - Track Your Business Progress

How will you know if your business is doing well? Not everyone can afford a full staff of analysts to track their business, but everyone can set up Key Performance Indicators (KPI). These KPI's can be as simple as tracking the number of scoops of ice cream you serve per day or much more complex.



Illinois workNet's webinar on Key Performance Indicators featured guest speaker Sybil Ege, Director of the [Illinois Small Business Development Center at Elgin Community College](#). She shared her expertise and examples on what the main KPI's are, as well as, how you can establish them for your business. She also discussed the importance of reacting to the statistics to make decisions that can change the course of your business direction in time to be effective. [Download the KPI handout](#) and [watch the archived webinar](#) to learn more!

IESBGA News - Peer Coach

Peer Coaches are experienced Certified Business Development Advisors (CBDA) who assumes the responsibility of guiding new Business Development Advisors through the training and certification process. The Peer Coaches evaluates the training activities of the new Business Development Advisors and documents the completion of these activities. Working with new Business Development Advisors provides the Peer Coaches with the

opportunity to stay current on new resources that will benefit their clients. A Peer Coach is able to tap into the research done by new Business Development Advisors as they discover new resources and share them to the Business Development Advisor's meetings and discussions. The Peer Coach is expanding their circle of friends and increasing their network of resources to call on when in need. Increasing the collaboration within each center and between centers is beneficial to all advisors in the Network. Credit for re-certification is earned by fulfilling the responsibilities of a Peer Coach.

Business Development Advisors with expertise in a particular functional area (such as finance or procurement) may be asked by a Peer Coach to co-counsel a new Business Development Advisor. In this manner, the Business Development Advisor will have the opportunity to observe and learn first-hand from specialists in various areas. The Peer Coach has the responsibility of documenting any training activity that takes place under his or her guidance and reporting the satisfactory completion to the Program Administrator.

A Peer Coach:

- Provides a safe environment with support and encouragement
- Participates in in-person meetings and webinars
- Approves business development advisors assignments
- Answers business development advisors questions and addresses their concerns
- May observe business advisor's counseling sessions
- Participates in the Business Development Advisor Certification meetings and discussions

Personal Characteristics of Good Peer Coaches:

- Tolerance for "up close and personal" relationships
- Confidence in own ability and knowledge
- Consistency in good work habits and attitudes
- Self-esteem and pride in professional accomplishments
- Willingness to share information and techniques
- Willingness to learn from Business Advisor
- Flexibility--desire to try more than one approach
- Focus--ability to keep the Business Advisor on track in regard to the learning goals
- Patience!!!

If you are interested in being a Peer Coach within the Illinois SBDC Network please contact Priscilla Cordero at pcordero@govst.edu.

Network News and Moves - SBIR Road Tour Chicago

The SBIR Road Tour Chicago event will be held at the UIC Forum (725 Roosevelt Road) in Meeting Rooms, D, E & F. The Illinois SBDC at UIC is a sponsor. Please help us promote the event. For more information and registration details an Eventbrite page has been set up for the conference. The link is <http://sbirroadtourchicago.eventbrite.com/>.

Please help us promote this very special event by forwarding the link or the attached one page flyer to anyone you think would be interesting in participating in this workshop. Thank You.

America's SBDC Network Connect

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to access the latest issue of [America's SBDC Network Connect Newsletter](#). In this edition you will find information about the America's SBDC Annual

Conference and an announcement that **Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and Author of "Lean In" will be keynoting the conference this year.** Please check out her excellent [Ted Talk](#) you can view before you see her in person in San Francisco.

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The **WEEKLY CONNECTION** is distributed by the Illinois SBDC and DCEO Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology each Monday to members of the DCEO Illinois SBDC Network to provide the service delivery partners with regular updates on small business issues, opportunities and resources. You may send any information to share with the Illinois SBDC Network to Tom.Becker@illinois.gov. Please feel free to forward this update to other interested resource providers and key stakeholders.

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