



## Success takes a front seat for Hometown Trolley

### Small Business Development Center at UW-Green Bay is Critical to the Journey

Chuck Brys knows opportunity when he sees it. Four years ago, he saw it with Hometown Trolley — a small, family-owned, North American participant in the specialty transportation market. As a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) counselor, Brys felt the company was “a 20-million-dollar company in a two-million-dollar package.”

It was time to maximize the organization’s potential, and he was confident the SBDC could help.

That is why he was thrilled when Hometown Trolley was honored earlier this year at the 2016 Manufacturing Awards of Distinction in the Small Business category (100 or fewer employees) for its recent growth and innovation. And that his intuition four years ago was accurate.

The Crandon, Wis., company manufactures trackless trolleys that replicate nostalgic streetcars of the 1800’s. Since 2012, Brys has worked with Hometown’s President and CEO, Kristina Pence-Dunow. She had a

vision, and he had the expertise to help her realize it. Their teamwork helped Hometown reach extraordinary heights in production, sales and expansion.

But the competition — one that out manufactured and outsized Hometown — was also able to out price Hometown. Knowing they couldn’t continue to prosper on a price-based competitive model, Pence-Dunow initiated a bold strategy: change the competitive landscape to one based on innovation and product development.

The company set to create new designs and implement new technologies. This took several years, but resulted in revolutionary new products, like power options that include traditional propulsion technologies, but also alternatives like propane, compressed gas and recycled oils; a low floor design which offers street level boarding; a full range of construction design options, and more.

And the industry bought it. Literally.

Within four years, Hometown Trolley moved into an 18,000 square foot production facility. Sales revenues quadrupled from \$2.8

million in 2013 to \$12 million in 2016. And the workforce grew from 12 employees to 47.

“To win this award...to see this success... it makes it a reality that we fit into a category of excellence,” Pence-Dunow says. “It’s motivating, knowing ideas can turn into results.”

“That’s why I do this job,” says Brys. “To give companies like Hometown an unbiased outside perspective. It’s thrilling to see them thrive and know I helped them along the way.”

*The Wisconsin SBDC at UW-Green Bay is part of a statewide network supporting entrepreneurs and business owners through no-cost, confidential consulting and targeted educational programs. SBDC experts facilitate improvement and growth for small and emerging mid-size companies and help launch successful new enterprises. At UW-Green Bay, the SBDC served nearly 300 clients in 13 Northeastern Wisconsin counties, and devoted 1,786 hours to client consulting in 2015, which included 33 business start-ups. Counselors are located in UW-Green Bay’s Cofrin School of Business.*

— Story by freelance writer Kim Viduski '92