U.S. Small Business Administration Honors UA Fayetteville Center for Excellence and Innovation

April 27, 2022

The U.S. Small Business Administration has recognized the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville's Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center with its 2022 Arkansas SBDC Excellence and Innovation Award.

SBA Arkansas District Director Edward Haddock will present the award May 3 in Little Rock during National Small Business Week.

Criteria for the honor included achieving performance milestones; helping new and established small businesses increase revenues and create and retain jobs through innovative programs and events; and supporting local and regional small business and economic development by advancing opportunities for entrepreneurial development and educating the community about SBA programs.

The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, has hosted an Arkansas SBTDC regional office since 1980. The office is part of the university's Economic Development Division.

From its main location in downtown Fayetteville and satellite location in Bentonville, the center serves entrepreneurs and businesses in six counties in Northwest Arkansas: Benton, Boone, Carroll, Madison, Newton, and Washington.

Mary Beth Brooks leads the UA Fayetteville ASBTDC. Spurred by the pandemic and supported by CARES and private funding, she has built a

skilled and nimble team of full-time and part-time consultants, contract experts, and interns.

Since 2018, the year Brooks arrived, the center has recorded capital infusion of $82.2 million, 1,452 jobs created and retained, and 135 business starts.

In 2021, the office assisted more than 1,300 individuals. The center's comprehensive and high-quality services met a wide range of client needs, from pre-venture entrepreneurs starting businesses to existing businesses confronting a pandemic to science-and-tech companies exploring commercialization.

"I am tremendously proud of the innovation and creativity this office demonstrates through consulting, outreach, and events. Mary Beth and her team are vital partners in economic development and champions for small businesses across all industries," said ASBTDC State Director Laura Fine.

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In response to frequent requests from small businesses for help and guidance in marketing, the center formed a marketing team to provide advice and hands-on training on social media strategy, website services such as Shopify and SEO, professional photography for the web and social media platforms, and graphic design.

The UAF ASBTDC also became experts on the pandemic relief funding programs offered by SBA and helped many clients secure these coveted dollars. Clients receiving funding from every federal program offered (PPP 1 and 2, EIDL Targeted Advance, EIDL COVID Loan, RRF, SVOG), as well as state and local sources.

The center helped a local restaurant, in business since 1977, survive the pandemic with funding and fresh ideas. Located in a basement by the historic Fayetteville Square, Hugo's has long been "cool," but operating in a basement was challenging amid COVID.

"The ASBTDC was vital in keeping Hugo's in business throughout the pandemic. I truly do not know what I would have done without their help," said owner Jason Piazza.

With ASBTDC assistance, Hugo's obtained $438,898 from the Restaurant Revitalization Fund, plus five other sources of COVID relief funding.

Piazza attended the center's live webinars and its weekly NWA Restaurant Forum, created at the onset of COVID to provide restaurateurs a space to share their concerns, struggles, and solutions and to hear from experts about issues facing the industry. "Our weekly Zoom meetings allowed us to share ideas and solutions and create a sense of community. We were all in it together," he said.

The center advised Piazza on an employee retention and hiring strategy and worked with him to develop a more consistent social media presence.

"The most important thing the ASBTDC provided was the reassurance that there was a group of local professionals who truly cared about Hugo's and wanted to see us through this extremely challenging time," he said. "They had our backs, and it meant everything. We are forever grateful."

The Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration through a partnership with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock College of Business, Health, and Human Services and other institutions of higher education. All opinions, conclusions, or recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBA. All ASBTDC programs are extended to the public on a non-discriminatory basis.

Arkansas SBTDC
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

"ASBTDC has been a tremendous help in navigating the small business loans and grants that were offered to help us get through COVID shutdowns and loss of revenue. Without their guidance, the process would have been much more stressful. Mary Beth and Lindsay have been very attentive to the needs of our business and are constantly offering advice, support, and the high fives we've needed along the way!"

– STUART WALKER
OWNER, CLUBHAUS FITNESS

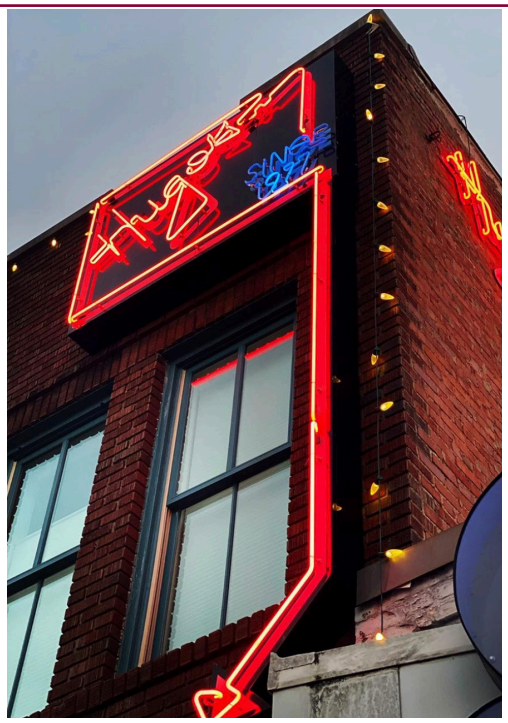
"When we decided to open our business, we looked into the center and were pleasantly surprised by the resources available! There's no reason not to sign up as a client. We wouldn't have had such a professional or robust brand had we not received services from ASBTDC."

– LEAH AND DANIEL JORDAN
OWNERS, PEARL'S BOOKS

"If you are not aware of the wealth of resources that this program offers, you are really missing out. From initial development of an idea to business planning, from operations execution to all the resources, I have gotten so much support from the center. I've also been able to make great connections with professionals who really know what they are doing and can offer valuable input and education to improve my business.

The ASBTDC helped by making valuable industry information available, which allowed me to make a more educated decision about purchasing the business. I love the availability of Lori and her willingness to offer sound advice and her work coordinating different resources and collaboration with other professionals. Lori has become my go-to person to navigate the planning of my business."

– ALICIA WIGINTON
OWNER, RED BARN DONUTS



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– JASON PIAZZA
OWNER, HUGO'S RESTAURANT

"ASBTDC marketing consultant Lindsay Ramsey was my contact, and she was incredible. Her team and the resources she connected me to were top notch. We are grateful for the expertise that each of you are affording me and my business. I recommend ASBTDC to everyone I talk to!

– JEFF SNOW
OWNER, J-ARK BUILDING

ASBTDC
ARKANSAS SMALL BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Quotes from Clients

"I am happy that I discovered ASBTDC, and they have taken an interest in my small business. It is a benefit and encouragement."

– MICHAEL HOCKLANDER
PRESIDENT, CARIBE PRODUCERS
DBA FIVE STAR JERKY