

Eastern Pennsylvania Small Business Development Center Excellence and Innovation Award: *Wilkes University Small Business Development Center, located in Wilkes-Barre; Director Dorothy Lane; nominated by Dr. Ernie Post, State Director, Pennsylvania Small Business Development Centers Network.*

The Wilkes University SBDC is part of the nationally accredited Pennsylvania SBDC network. We provide educational training, business resources, and experienced no-cost, confidential consulting to small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs. The Wilkes University SBDC provides services to individuals and businesses in Carbon, Columbia, Luzerne, Schuylkill and Sullivan counties. Services range from basic start-up assistance to more in depth engagements with seasoned business owners. Over the past few years much of our time has been focused on COVID relief programs and assisting small business owners with on-line marketing efforts.

Over the past 30 months or so the team at the Wilkes University SBDC has worked hand in hand with our partners at the SBA to inform small business owners about the COVID relief products available to them to help navigate the devastating financial impact of COVID. The team has assisted with the application portion and over the last year or so worked with clients as they prepare to payoff or pay down their loans. Similarly the SBDC has assisted clients in accessing ARPA funding distributed through a variety of channels. The Wilkes University SBDC team is well versed in the 504 and 7A loan programs and when appropriate suggests these products to clients in need of funding. At the end of the previous fiscal year the Wilkes University SBDC had assisted clients in securing \$9,247,860.73 in capital. Much of this can be attributed to 504 and 7A loans as well COVID relief funding. Additionally, we have added a bilingual consultant to our staff in an effort to reach Hispanic clients. Prior to the onset of the pandemic the staff of the Wilkes University SBDC regularly joined other economic development partners and the SBA to deliver the Boots to Business program to veterans in our regions.

Provide qualities and performance of the SBDC that merit the award:

SBA Form 3310 (09/2021) (Previous Editions Obsolete)

The past fiscal year has been a year of growth for the Wilkes University SBDC. The Center has been able to retain our Cares Consultant Jacqueline Escobar as a full-time consultant who has helped us make great inroads in providing much-needed service to the Hispanic Community.

The Wilkes University SBDC partnered with the Wyoming Valley Chamber to assist them with their SPARK rent rebate program. Businesses seeking to establish or expand a presence in Wilkes-Barre and who would in turn be eligible to have their rent/mortgage paid for a year were required to work with the SBDC. The SBDC has worked with 27 businesses to date.

The Wilkes SBDC partnered with one of our LDD's, NEPA Alliance and the University of Scranton SBDC to deliver a Community Development Block Grant to small businesses who suffered losses as result of the pandemic. This program was labor intensive and required a great deal of effort. Our Center worked with over 400 applicants to submit required tax and benefit documents to their files so NEPA Alliance could review and determine funding eligibility.

The Wilkes University SBDC, the Wyoming Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Institute were also successful in securing an ARC grant that which will address systemic and historical barriers to entrepreneurship and business growth that individuals from minority communities experience by providing accessible and inclusive resources for minority-owned businesses, providing them with all stages of education and technical resources to start-up or continue to grow their business.

Finally, the Wilkes SBDC and the University of Scranton SBDC have worked closely with our economic development partners in the Northeast and Northern Tier PREP regions on the Get Connected program. Get Connected was developed to assist small businesses in creating or expanding their online presence as another revenue stream during the pandemic. The SBDCs have coordinated these efforts and have provided training.