

SUCCESS STORY

SBA AWARDS 2024

MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR (category)

Small Business Winner: Aquila's Nest Vineyards

**CONNECTICUT SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER
(CTSBDC)**

CTSBDC BUSINESS ADVISOR: NELSON MERCHAN

Aquila's Nest Vineyards was founded by Neviana Zhgaba and her husband, Ardian Llomi, to produce wines ultimately bring people together, cultivate stronger communities, provoke storytelling, and promote local art.

Neviana came to Connecticut Small Business Development Center (CTSBDC) looking for help accessing capital to start their business and open their facility. Nelson Merchan, CTSBDC Business Advisor, helped Neviana and her husband evaluate their funding options and reviewed their business and marketing plan.

Starting their own vineyard required a lot of research to make their dream a successful reality. "Neviana and Ardian's vision and preparation, which included visiting many vineyards across the globe, paid off. From the time I began working with them I could see the successful business they were building." stated Nelson Merchan.

The company secured a total of \$225,000 in capital, comprising a \$120,000 SBA 7a Loan, a \$70,000 Commercial Bank Loan, and a \$30,000 Line of Credit. Additionally, they received a \$5,000 grant from the DECD CARES Act. This infusion of capital facilitated the creation of 29 new jobs within the organization.

Since working with CTSBDC, Aquila's Nest has been operating very successfully. Their business is exceeding their goals. Neviana and her husband look forward to continuing to offer unique, interesting experiences for their customers.

"Nelson is a very attentive and trusted business advisor. He's my go to person for every business decision I'd like to bounce off from an experienced and empathetic advisor," shared Neviana.

Aquila's Nest Vineyards blends mythology with astronomy, branding each wine with a constellation and a woman's name from ancient Mediterranean myths. Spanning 10 acres within a 40-acre, 200-year-old farm, they offer nine seasonal wines. Committed to community impact, they've empowered over 80 women-owned businesses and collaborated with 100+ local enterprises to curate unique wine and arts experiences. Hosting 580+ music performances since October 2020, they promote local talent and support the arts by exhibiting outdoor sculptures.

Climate Neutral Certified for two years, they offset all operational carbon emissions, embodying sustainability in their practices.