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## SBDC again providing in-person counseling

By DON SERGENT [dsergent@bgdailynews.com](mailto:dsergent@bgdailynews.com)

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Michele Kors

Submitted

Kevin Yates and Michele Kors, the business coaches hired last year by the regional consortium now overseeing southcentral Kentucky's Small Business Development Center, have provided virtual help to more than a few local businesses navigating the uncertainties brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

Now the coaches are ready to begin in-person counseling again, even as many business owners continue to struggle with reopening during a time when COVID-19 cases continue to surge.

"We're seeing a pickup in business startups and existing businesses needing help with human resources and marketing," Yates said. "We're still encouraging Zoom teleconferences when possible, but we're available to meet in person now."



Kevin Yates

Submitted

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Yates and Kors have offices in Western Kentucky University's Center for Research and Development at Nashville Road and Campbell Lane. Meetings there can be important for the new

Local business coaches find new ways to help clients

businesses and potential startups that Yates said make up about 80% of their clients.

Yates, a Bowling Green native and WKU graduate, said the local SBDC has transitioned from helping clients apply for the federal Paycheck Protection Program and COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans to applying for traditional financing.

“The bulk of the businesses we work with have fewer than 10 employees,” Yates said. “They’re now wanting to partner with banks and lenders in the area. We try to better prepare them for that. Banks want comprehensive business plans and five years of projections. We can turn those things around in two or three days.”

In addition to helping entrepreneurs find financing, Yates said the SBDC provides the often-unappreciated service of analyzing the viability of business plans.

“We do a lot of feasibility analysis,” he said. “We don’t want anybody to fail. Quite often, we tell people that their idea isn’t going to work out. A lot of times people don’t want to hear that.”

Yates said the local SBDC “gets calls all the time” about the struggles business owners are having with finding employees. Another common topic is how to get started with electronic commerce.

“We’ve been helping people get into e-commerce as they try to find ways to stay open,” Yates said. “We help them optimize their websites and email marketing. A lot of people don’t think about how important e-commerce is. There are still quite a few who don’t have a website or online presence.”

Yates – who has a background in e-commerce from his six years with Fruit of the Loom – and Kors, a former commercial loan officer, were brought on board when the local SBDC was resurrected after being dormant for more than a year.

As part of its budget cutting, WKU stopped providing the annual \$75,000 local match for the SBDC but continued allowing the business coaches to use office space at the Center for Research and Development.

A group of regional government and economic development organizations, led by the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, pulled together the funds needed to continue the local SBDC, which is one of 15 across the state.

Chamber President and CEO Ron Bunch said funding the business coaches is a good investment.

“We are confident that by providing direct business coaching we will be able to continue driving overall economic growth,” he said.

More information about the local SBDC can be found at [kentucky sbdc.com/bowling-green](http://kentucky sbdc.com/bowling-green).

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**Don Sergent**