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Local business coaches find new ways to help clients

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Kevin Yates

Submitted

Michele Kors and Kevin Yates, who were hired last July to staff the Southcentral Small Business Development Center after it was resurrected by local government and economic development groups, still haven't set foot in their offices in the Western Kentucky University Center for Research and Development on Nashville Road.



Michele Kors

Submitted

But that doesn't mean they haven't been working.

Kors and Yates were hired as business coaches for the SBDC, which had briefly gone dormant in 2019 after cash-strapped WKU cut the \$75,000 annual funding used to match U.S. Small Business Administration and state dollars.

MORE INFORMATION



Kors, Yates
hired as
business
coaches for
local SBDC

Small business
center making
comeback

Allen County Director of Economic Development Johnny Hobdy, Logan County Economic Alliance for Development Executive Director Tom Harned and Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Ron Bunch spearheaded a fundraising effort to come up with the funding match from city and county governments and industrial development groups in the region.

The Kentucky SBDC that is housed at the University of Kentucky then brought Kors and Yates on board. They were immediately forced to adapt to the social distancing requirements and the new needs of budding entrepreneurs brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

“We haven’t been in the office, but we’re seeing quite a few clients,” Yates said. “We’ve probably been able to meet more clients through Zoom (video conference) than we would have otherwise. We’ve found a lot of creative ways to meet with people.”

Yates, who said during a Thursday phone call that he has worked with 40 to 50 clients this month alone,

admits that the pandemic has created challenges. It has also created needs in the small business community that he and Kors are trying to meet.

“We’re seeing people who have been laid off and have time on their hands, and maybe they’re thinking about starting their own business,” Yates said. “I’ve helped people write business plans and get registered with the state and figure out what their next step is.”

For many, the next step is adjusting to the pandemic environment by utilizing social media and electronic commerce to help their businesses grow.

“A lot of people are realizing that having a website is not enough in this environment,” Yates said. “They need to implement social media strategies.”

Another online strategy, e-commerce, has become a big part of the coaching that Yates is doing.

“Everybody is selling online now,” he said. “With so many storefronts being closed, now is a good opportunity to utilize e-commerce.”

Many clients, though, are simply concerned with staying afloat in the business-stifling environment of the pandemic. Helping them take advantage of resources available through federal legislation aimed at pandemic relief has been the main focus of Kors since she came on board.

The local SBDC is affiliated with the SBA, making it a great resource for navigating the application process for the SBA-administered Pay-check Protection Program forgivable loans instituted through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

Kors, whose background is in banking, said: “I work closely with the SBA so the clients I work with have the correct information.”

Kors works one-on-one with many clients, particularly those in the service sector, and last week she put

together a webinar about PPP loans.

“We brought in SBA people and other experts,” Kors said. “We got a strong turnout.”

Such webinars are a silver lining in the pandemic cloud, Kors said.

“Prior to COVID, all our trainings were done in person,” she said. “Not everyone can do that. It’s a positive thing that technology has allowed us to do these webinars.”

Yates, too, has utilized webinars and Zoom meetings to work with clients and get the word out about the services offered through the local SBDC, which is one of 17 such centers throughout the state.

“There have been a few hiccups with the technology,” Yates said, “but using Zoom for our webinars and trainings has allowed them to be accessed by people all around the state.”

Still, Yates is as ready as his clients are to get back to normal.

“I hope in the next couple of months that we can move into the center on Nashville Road and start meeting with clients,” he said.

More information about the SBDC and the resources it offers can be found at the ksbdc.org/bowling-green website.

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