

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke



News Release

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UNCP's Entrepreneurial Summit explained small business finance

PEMBROKE, N.C. – “This is like a shot in the arm for me,” said business owner Bobbi Amato of Southern Pines. “I have an idea to start a business, and the information I’ve learned here is excellent. I’ve networked with a lot of interesting people.”

Amato joined a group of approximately 100 entrepreneurs in an Entrepreneurial Summit on March 12, sponsored by the Thomas Family Center for Entrepreneurship. The conference was hosted at the Regional Center for Economic, Community and Professional Development of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

The ‘E’ Summit, the Thomas Center’s second, was titled “Financing for Entrepreneurs and Small Business” and featured speakers from UNC’s Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC), the Small Business Administration (SBA), Lumbee Guaranty Bank and UNC Wilmington’s Technology Transfer Program.

“The speakers were excellent and informative,” Amato said. “I like that they all have real business backgrounds.”

Ideas require financing to become businesses, so it was an attentive and diverse audience comprised of more than half women with interest in a broad spectrum in businesses from real estate to construction to wine making. They came from Myrtle Beach, S.C., Raleigh, Lexington, N.C., and Pembroke too.

Darlene Huggins Gabbard grows grapes and makes wine in Lexington under the label Native Vines. A Lumbee Indian and Pembroke native, Gabbard’s company is the only American Indian winery in the nation.

“It’s been tough, but we’re growing and that requires financing,” Gabbard said. “The wine business is new to banks, so I’m trying to learn as much as possible today.”

Susan Swink is a real estate broker who works with Sherrie Barnes to develop Palm Island Estates, an 80-acre tract in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

“We are looking for financing to put the infrastructure in place,” Barnes said. “This program is very helpful.”

Harvey Dial’s Fairmont-based company has done the masonry work for several buildings on UNCP’s campus. He is using the economic slowdown to research business ideas.

“I’m collecting ideas to see which way to go,” Dial said. “It’s slow right now.”

Recession or not, LaTonya Adams just opened a real estate company, FavoriteAgent.com, in nearby Rowland.

“We’re looking into an outlet mall and possibly some downtown buildings for small businesses,” Adams said. “We’re here to learn and network.”

It was all about money for six solid hours. Experts in start-ups and growing small businesses gave workshops on a wide range of financing, including “angel,” bank, SBA and venture capital.

“The SBTDC performs several services for small businesses, but I focus on money,” said Tim Janke, director of SBTDC’s Private Equity Initiatives. “Somewhere in the spectrum of capital financing, there is a fit for your business.”

Angel financing is one, and this age-old method is becoming more sophisticated with Internet matchmaking, trade associations and collective as well as traditional individual lending.

“Angel financing is the biggest source of money for small business start-ups, up to \$50 billion annually,” said Ronald Podraza, director of Technology Transfer at UNC Wilmington. “They generally lend smaller amounts of money, for 5-7 years, and they expect a high rate of return for their risk.”

From well-organized companies, venture capital is a source for higher levels of financing, Janke said.

“It used to be that North Carolina was a flyover state for venture capitalists, but they land here now,” he said.

Kyle Chavis, credit administrator for Lumbee Guaranty Bank of Pembroke, said banks are tightening credit requirements, but community banks are still in the lending business.

“Community banks are solid,” Chavis said. “So, in a difficult environment, how do small business people get financing?”

“One thing I recommend is utilizing the SBTDC,” he said. “If someone goes to the time and effort to do that level of business planning, they get points with me.”

There is an SBTDC office in UNCP’s Regional Center. The ties between university and main street - town and gown – are growing deeper, said Dr. Carmen Calabrese, director of the Thomas Center.

“You are the engine of our economy,” Dr. Calabrese said. “Small business creates the jobs and wealth today.”

Dr. Charles Harrington, provost and vice chancellor for Academic Affairs, offered a range of University assistance.

“What you see here is the variety of support that the University has to offer,” Dr. Harrington said. “We are a resource to you.”

For information about the Thomas Family Center for Entrepreneurship, contact (910) 775-4208 or email thomasfamilycenter@uncp.edu. For information about SBTDC services, contact (910) 775-4000 or email elizabeth.wilkerson@uncp.edu.