The Director’s Cut

As spring finally dawns in Minnesota, we at the Office for Business & Community Economic Development would like to wish everyone a warm and productive season.

Like the weather, the economy is improving steadily, if a bit slowly; it is clear that the road to economic recovery is steady and sure. Hopefully current signs of progress will instill enough confidence in our small business owners to begin forging ahead with their business plans and goals. It takes work and dedication to grow a business, but we know that small companies are the key to our country’s economic recovery, and that the country’s financial and commercial status can only continue flourishing as our small business community grows and prospers. Even though the current state of our economy can be cause for concern, it can also provide us with a tremendous opportunity for the entrepreneurial spirit to thrive. Adversity fosters ingenuity, new innovation and creativity; it also forces us to stop and reevaluate our values and our standards for excellence.

Since spring is often seen as a symbol for growth and change, we sincerely hope that our local business community, as well as our local residents, embrace the optimism associated with this notion. We have weathered a long, cold winter, just as we have weathered a difficult and stagnant economy. We believe the worst has come and gone and that the future for our community and our businesses has no limit.

D. Craig Taylor
Executive Director, Office for Business & Community Economic Development and the Business & Technology Center

Inside this issue:

- Women Wear Hard Hats Too
- Workshop for nonprofits to learn to demonstrate value
- Targeted Business Program gets WMBEs engaged at the University
- Broadband Access Project wraps first calendar quarter of 2011
- B-Tech continues free computer classes
- Youth Entrepreneurship Program gearing up for summer
- Business acceleration program in the works
- Small business profile: Rani Engineering

Highlights

- Summit Academy trains women for construction (page 2)
- MTAP workshop gives nonprofits tools to define value (page 2)
- Free computer training in North Minneapolis all summer (page 3)
- Business acceleration program piloted; due to launch late 2011 (page 3)
- Rani Engineering profiled (back cover)

Breaking the Ice with BCED

BCED interns Mahogany and David help make our office operations a success

Here at the Office for Business & Community Economic Development (BCED), we couldn’t do all that we do without our fabulous interns!

Mahogany Ellis is currently finishing her freshman year at the U of M and her first year as an office intern for BCED. This semester, she has been working on a variety of projects, such as updating and researching new agency profiles for the MTAP/Map database, updating Map/MTAP student profiles, scouting out details from various general contractors about their targeted inclusion reports for construction projects, and proofreading Google Sites for the Broadband Access Project. She is constantly interested in pursuing Business, Chinese and Spanish in school; she is also a member of the U of M Women’s Rowing team. Mahogany also just finished serving as a health advocate for her residence hall for which she received a certification of appreciation and service acknowledgment by Boynton Health Services at the U. You won’t find her at BCED after school is out, though; Mahogany has landed a summer internship with Land O’ Lakes in their accounting department. In the future, Mahogany hopes find a satisfying career in corporate America and then launch her own entrepreneurial projects.

David Stratioti is a graduating senior at the U of M Carlson School of Management majoring in Entrepreneurial Management. For BCED, David has worked on research for projects for Business Development Services, the marketing campaign for CHI Student Projects, and creating the material for the BAP website, “Creating a Successful Small Business.” His extracurricular activities include membership in the Beta Theta Pi fraternity and mentoring for the Trent Tucker University Scholars Program supporting students from the WISE Charter School. After graduation, David hopes to work in small business consulting and marketing. David is looking for a great company with which to work after he completes school; please email him at strat073@umn.edu if you have an opening for a great employee!
Summit Academy working to include women in the construction industry

Believing that competitive workforces are not single-gendered, Summit Academy OIC is breaking down the barriers that have existed to train, prepare and find jobs for women in construction by launching the “Women Wear Hard Hats Too” initiative.

The initiative trains women in the trades and also offers support for the unique issues they face including stereotypes about gender, physical ability and more. Summit is a Minneapolis-based nonprofit educational and vocational center that teaches individuals from economically depressed neighborhoods in the Twin Cities to become educated, employed, contributing members of the community.

“Our partners in the construction industry have told us that they want to hire women but that they can't find female workers that possess the skills they need to do the job,” said Louis King, CEO of Summit Academy OIC. “We want to fill that need and also provide opportunities for these women to develop a career that will last them a lifetime.”

The initiative was launched in January of this year and is overseen by an advisory committee comprised of project owners, contractors, tradeswomen and other industry related leaders. Currently 7 women are enrolled in the program and more registered following an event held April 5 that featured presentations by Kraus Anderson, the University of Minnesota Office for Business & Community Economic Development, and Thor Construction. The next training enrollment is May 9.

“We want to help organizations stay competitive by offering them women that are highly skilled and ready to work,” King said. “We placed 14 women last year and expect to place 25 more by the end of this year.”

For more information about the Women Wear Hard Hats Too initiative, please contact Tanessa Greene at 612-804-5663.

MTAP for Nonprofits offers summer workshop on communicating value

The Office for Business & Community Economic Development’s Targeted Business (TGB) Program continues to create opportunities for women- and minority-owned companies to do business at the University. Over the past three months, targeted businesses have won contracts in a variety of areas, including uniform supply, IT staffing, and leadership development. It should be noted that the diverse nature of these contracts is evidence that we have a well-rounded and robust minority- and women-owned business community in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area that is ready and able to serve the variety of needs that the University faces on a regular basis, from construction and remodeling projects, to furniture and office supply needs, to catering and event management.

While working on contracts for the University, these targeted businesses also partner with large corporations to complete projects; some current examples of targeted businesses working with larger firms include information technology systems implementation, temporary staffing, and the Biomedical Discovery District construction among others. As always, we look forward to top-notch service as our targeted business partners deliver on these commitments.

Local WMBEs find variety of contracts at the University

The Office for Business & Community Economic Development’s Targeted Business (TGB) Program continues to create opportunities for women- and minority-owned companies to do business at the University. Over the past three months, targeted businesses have won contracts in a variety of areas, including uniform supply, IT staffing, and leadership development. It should be noted that the diverse nature of these contracts is evidence that we have a well-rounded and robust minority- and women-owned business community in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area that is ready and able to serve the variety of needs that the University faces on a regular basis, from construction and remodeling projects, to furniture and office supply needs, to catering and event management.

While working on contracts for the University, these targeted businesses also partner with large corporations to complete projects; some current examples of targeted businesses working with larger firms include information technology systems implementation, temporary staffing, and the Biomedical Discovery District construction among others. As always, we look forward to top-notch service as our targeted business partners deliver on these commitments.

Local minority- and women-owned businesses can find out more about the TGB Program at bced.umn.edu/Programs.
BAP continues to reach more residents, launches website

The First Quarter 2011 of the Broadband Access Project (BAP) focused on curriculum development in the areas of e-healthcare, e-small business and e-nonprofit. A tool was developed to assess the skills and needs of not-for-profit staff so that trainings could be customized for each partner organization.

Site visits were completed with each Public Computer Center (PCC) partner, and outreach plans are being revised.

Meetings were held with PCC partners in January and March, and evaluation site visits were conducted at each PCC. A Google website has been developed to coordinate the project, including site maintenance, curriculum, and evaluation.

Outreach and awareness activities included launching the development of a UMN website, www.bap.umn.edu, for groups to schedule trainings and providers to make referrals.

Free technology training at B-Tech all summer

Throughout the summer, The Office for Business & Community Economic Development will offer five computer classes at the B-Tech Center. The classes are designed for beginners and people who want a refresher. All classes are free and open to anyone.

Computer Basics: This class is an introduction to basic computer terms, the proper way to turn the computer off, navigating through Windows, and creating and managing folders and files.

Internet Basics & Safety: If you have basic computer skills, try our Internet Basics & Safety class, to learn how the Internet works, basic Internet terms, how to perform searches, and safety measures to protect yourself online.

Keyboarding: Using Mavis Beacon, a typing program, participants go through lessons at their own pace to improve speed and accuracy; they also find custom lessons, skill-building games, and immediate feedback on progress.

Microsoft Word 2007: Know how to use a computer, but need help with word processing? The Microsoft Word 2007 class will demonstrate how to navigate Word, edit text, format paragraphs, create lists with bullets and numbers, use spell check, and more.

Microsoft Excel 2007: One of our more advanced classes, to teach you how to create, edit and move through spreadsheets, insert formulas, apply formats, print Excel documents, and more.

Classes are offered Monday through Thursday, every other week, with morning and evening classes available. At the end of each month, all participants who attended a class will be entered into our raffle for a $25 gift certificate.

To register, or for more information, call Tina Hanson at 612-624-3478 or visit bit.ly/btechtraining.

jEM preparations under way; youth entrepreneurs blossom at North High

We are checking the last items off the list for this year’s Junior Entrepreneurs of Minnesota (jEM) summer program, which starts June 13! The program is an excellent opportunity for creative, driven high school students from the Twin Cities area. Through interactive lessons, visits from guest speakers, and an ongoing service project, students will learn what it takes to be an entrepreneur. Focus is placed upon developing and strengthening leadership, networking and communication skills. 25 ambitious and hardworking teens graduated from jEM in 2010, and we hope to only improve upon last summer’s success! The application deadline for this year’s program is May 8; if you can’t apply this year, we invite you to check out bced.umn.edu for more details on all of our youth entrepreneurship programs.

In other youth entrepreneurship news, the North High Spirit Store is now up and running; a group of North High students has worked hard to get sweatshirts ordered, develop marketing strategies, and keep their books balanced. With the upcoming warmer months in mind, the students are currently making plans to begin selling shorts, t-shirts and other summer clothing. Beginning in May, they will be setting up shop at UROC after school a few times each week, so keep an eye out for these young entrepreneurs, so you can get your hands on some great North High apparel!

Business acceleration program piloted; full program starts in fall

The services offered to small businesses through the Business Development Services (BDS) program at the B-Tech Center continue to expand with the creation of a business acceleration program. After extensive research, our office decided to offer a program that would provide a select number of small business owners with the knowledge, tools and connections needed to grow sustainable businesses and become better leaders. The program offerings include coaching/mentoring, peer group sessions, student consultant projects, and high-impact workshops.

To better establish what the program would entail before officially kicking off the program, Jeffrey Seitz, Manager of BDS, launched a pilot in March with four local small businesses to "test" assumptions and the value. So far, it has been a great success. Not only have the business owners found real benefits in the program, but they have also helped us learn a great deal about what we can do to improve the program. For those interested in finding out more about the program and/or applying, please contact Jeffrey Seitz at seitz0012@umn.edu or 612-624-3578.

Our current goal is to open the application process in July and launch the full program in September, so make sure you watch for updates on our departmental website, at bced.umn.edu.
Local small business profile: Rani Engineering

Rani Engineering provides professional civil engineering, land surveying and railway signal services. Established in 1993, Rani Engineering Inc. has grown from two employees to a 25-person, professional engineering services firm with a nationwide track record in the public and private sector.

"Rani Engineering is an overnight success that took 17 years," states Susan Rani, PE, President and CEO of Rani Engineering. A graduate of the University of MN civil engineering program, Susan first worked as a structural engineer on nuclear power plants in California, then as a staff engineer for the Corps of Engineers, and later, for Mn/DOT.

With this experience, Susan started Rani Engineering with more enthusiasm and motivation than proven ability to succeed. Rani Engineering’s first assignment was environmental remediation and closeout of three research facilities of the U.S. Bureau of Mines. With its subcontractor, Conestoga-Rovers & Associates, the firm completed environmental closure within budget and on time. This project gave the firm confidence and proof that it could lead and manage a multi-million-dollar contract successfully. Other federal clients followed, including the U.S. Air Force, Veterans Affairs, Army Command, and the Corps of Engineers.

Staying focused. By carefully reviewing project scope, schedule, owners’ expectations, project team characteristics and risk factors, Rani Engineering has made good decisions and avoided high-risk, low-success projects.

Staying ready. After the peak of the residential building collapse in 2008, the firm took a risk and expanded to include land surveying, a complementary service to civil engineering. Signature surveying projects include Central Corridor Light Rail Transit and the I-35W St. Anthony Bridge Reconstruction.

Exceeding expectations. The firm believes that understanding the clients’ spoken and unspoken expectations is the key to successful projects and satisfied repeat clients.

With the success of completed projects and prospects of expanded opportunities, Rani Engineering is poised for growth. Susan reflects, "The best part of my job is seeing our professionals grow personally and professionally in their lives. This gives the greatest joy and job satisfaction."

Contact:
Rani Engineering
2912 Anthony Lane, Suite 100 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55418
Phone: 612-455-3322
Fax: 612-455-3321
Web: www.rani.com