



Mason City MicroEnterprise Program: Building a Culture of Entrepreneurship

The City of Mason City and the NIACC JPEC have partnered together to launch the Mason City MicroEnterprise Program to help small businesses achieve sustainable growth. Microenterprises are defined as businesses with five or fewer employees. Over 83% of the businesses in Cerro Gordo County meet this criteria. In addition, microenterprises are also the fastest growing segment of new businesses, adding revenue and employees more quickly than larger and more established companies.

Participating businesses can receive reimbursement for pre-approved goods and/or services purchased within the city limits of Mason City. To qualify for MicroEnterprise funds, businesses must:

- Be a for-profit company.
- Own or lease commercial space in the city limits of Mason City. (No home-based businesses).
- Employ less than nine full-time equivalent employees in the twelve months prior to entering the program.
- Have been in business less than 5 years or have under \$500,000 in annual revenues.

In addition to pre-approval of the businesses' plans, each microenterprise must be taking steps to improve their chances for long-term business success. The goal is to strengthen the resident microbusinesses in Mason City and stimulate the local economy. Some entrepreneurs may choose to add staff or hire local contractors to improve their storefront or customer areas. Others may invest in equipment that improves their productivity. Business owners, working with the assistance of the NIACC JPEC, choose their own growth path. Ultimately, a stronger business environment benefits all. For more information, visit www.niacc.edu/pappajohn and click on the *MicroEnterprise* link.

North Central Mechanical Services Company

Nathan Bartels began his career as an apprentice heating and air conditioning specialist the summer before completing college at NIACC. Over the next decade he completed his heating and air conditioning certification while working for area HVAC contractors.

While Bartels was gaining experience working for others, he decided he wanted to start his own business. With good customer relations and strong client results, he believed he would be successful implementing his personal vision and work ethic within his own company. Nathan began to formulate his business plan and accumulate the necessary tools and cash to launch his own company.



Ted Bair and Nathan Bartels at North Central Mechanical Services Company.

INSIDE

Director's Notes.....2

Designing for the Next
Generation3

NanoLoans Awarded to
Area Businesses.....4

Spring 2012 FastStart
Graduates.....5

Knowing that he needed additional help, Nathan contacted Ted Bair, Regional Director of the North Iowa Area Small Business Development Center (SBDC), to evaluate his business plan, help determine cash flow requirements, and discover options for financing additional capital needs such as a larger service vehicle and starting inventory.

North Central Mechanical Services Company opened for business on August 18, 2010. The company provides commercial and residential heating, air conditioning, and refrigeration parts and services within 120 miles of Mason City.

(See North Central Mechanical, page 4)

Director's Notes

Youth Entrepreneurial Academy

The NIACC JPEC Youth Entrepreneurial Academy (YEA), designed to help North Iowa high school juniors and seniors learn the fundamental skills to become entrepreneurs, is scheduled for June 17 through 21 at NIACC in Mason City.

The Academy consists of several components including classroom sessions taught by experienced entrepreneurs, field trips to local businesses to see entrepreneurs in action, and time to connect with other like-minded students while working together to develop a business plan and presentation. YEA participants focus on the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes of entrepreneurship.

Selected students who complete the academy will be awarded a \$500 YEA Scholarship if they choose to attend NIACC. Up to \$2000 in scholarships are available to students enrolling in the Associate in Science (Business/ Entrepreneurship) Degree program at NIACC.

Happy Spring to everyone! It certainly came early this year, and with it, a real dose of optimism has sprung around North Iowa. We have had full classes for our Business Start and Acceleration programs, previously known as FastTrac[®]. Although this program has a new name, it will offer the same great results with many of the same instructors and content. The Business Start and Acceleration programs feature training in developing or improving a strong business plan, an opportunity to do feasibility studies with peers, and ongoing support from mentors and staff to help drive the business launch or assist with financing where needed. Business Start and Acceleration classes are filling fast, so watch for the next one and bring your idea and business in for a review.

We are working on developing a new program of study to help drive entrepreneurship and innovation in high school. This will be a dual-credit program delivered on-site in regional academies, and more information will be coming soon. Did you know that 80% of high school students want to know more about entrepreneurship and over 70% of high school students would like to own or run their own businesses? This is a great opportunity to assist them in that dream and help them stay in North Iowa, as well.

We are busy evaluating entries for the John Pappajohn Iowa Business Plan Competition. The NIACC JPEC as well as other Iowa JPECs, SBDCs and Business Accelerators work with the businesses interested in entering the contest to help them hone their plans for the competition. The top prize is \$25,000, and runners up receive \$15,000 and \$10,000. Latham Hi-Tech Seeds was one of the top three finalists several years ago, and they have seen rapid expansion since then. The prize money was helpful in their expansion.

Speaking of money, we have funds available in our Revolving Loan and NanoLoan Funds for qualifying businesses. If you are a microenterprise or a larger business in need of some gap financing, one of these programs might be just the ticket to move your dream or business along. Give us a call about any of these great support programs.

Business starts have taken a jump since the first of the year so we expect to see good numbers when we report after the end of our fiscal year. That means more jobs and more prosperity!! Still, there are too many people looking for a job. If you have an idea, contact the NIACC JPEC for assistance in getting started. We can help you determine if the idea is feasible, can be protected, launched, etc. We even have prototype machines that can turn a vision into a three dimensional object.

Finally, take a look at the cover story in this newsletter about the new Mason City MicroEnterprise Initiative. This innovative program was launched on April 17 as a partnership between the NIACC JPEC and the City of Mason City to provide another tool to help small businesses grow. Presuming success with this new project, other communities have asked if we would help them develop a similar program. But first we look to prove that this type of program can help small businesses expand, grow, add jobs and succeed. We will be reporting to the Mason City City Council on the results of the MicroEnterprise Initiative as we move forward.



*Jamie T. Zanios
NIACC Vice President
& JPEC Director*

Designing for the Next Generation: Part 2: It's About Quality of Life

By Molly Foley of Next Generation Consulting

How can North Iowa become a destination region for next generation entrepreneurs, business owners and citizen-leaders? This is the question I left you with in my last article. The answer? Promote what makes North Iowa unique and build up your quality of life assets!

A strong quality of life is what endears a community to the next generation and generations to come. Think bustling main streets, walkable neighborhoods, diverse career opportunities, and a vibrant art and music scene. Next Generation Consulting defines quality of life using seven indexes that encompass the attributes and attitudes young, educated workers value. What is your perception of North Iowa in each of the following indexes?



*Molly Foley, Next
Generation Consulting*

Cost of Lifestyle

In today's economy affordability is key. Young talent are normally in the early years of their earning potential and are carrying enormous college debt. How affordable is it to live in the region?

Earning

Young talent expect to have multiple jobs in their lifetimes and value a community with a breadth and depth of occupational options, plus support for entrepreneurial ventures. Does North Iowa have the career opportunities that will attract top talent?

Vitality

Living an active, healthy lifestyle is becoming more of a driving force in a person's decision on where to live. Consider healthy living attributes like air and water quality, parks, trails and recreation areas and access to healthy food. How does North Iowa rate?

Learning

Life-long learning is important, not only to people but to a community's prosperity. Young knowledgeable workers want to live in communities where education is valued and accessible – for themselves and their children. How committed is the region to providing quality education, both traditional and non-traditional?

Social Capital

Young professionals value living in diverse communities. Does the region embrace diversity from age to race to lifestyle? Is the voice of the next generation heard and respected?

After Hours

There's more to life than work. What's the after hours buzz in North Iowa? Can people enjoy good music, art, festivals, and other fun places to go after five?

Around Town

A person's happiness can be directly tied to how long they sit in traffic. That said, the next generation values living in communities where commute times are minimal and alternative modes of transit are valued. How well connected is the region? Can a person get around town by bike? By foot? How easy is it to get where you want to go?

When considering North Iowa's quality of life, one must look at the broader picture. That's what the seven indexes are designed to do. Consider both the reality of the region and the perception people have of the region - current and prospective residents.

What's your take on North Iowa? How do you perceive the region in each index?

In my final article, I will dive into specific ideas that emerged from NIACC's Community Leaders Symposium on Entrepreneurship held back in December.

(Editor's Note: This is the second of a series of articles by Molly Foley of Next Generation Consulting based on the outcomes and ideas generated at the December 14, 2011 NIACC Community Leaders Symposium.)

NanoLoans Help Launch Three Area Businesses

Three area business owners recently received NanoLoans from the NIACC JPEC. NanoLoans are available for business owners as they prepare to open their businesses.

Carla Day, owner of Cj's House Cleaning & Tidy Garden Care in Marble Rock, used her loan for start-up expenses. Carla said, "The NanoLoan was integral to me as I was able to purchase needed equipment, software, and promotional materials for the operation of my business, and pay for supplies and start-up costs that I had not anticipated. Ted Bair was there to help answer my questions and guide me in starting up my business." Carla can be reached at cjstidygardencare@hotmail.com or 641-330-6538.

Shari Hampton owns Animal Answers, a pet store which recently relocated from Clear Lake to 1407 S. Federal in Mason City. Shari said, "The NanoLoan made it possible for me to continue in business. It was used for moving expenses, customizing the new building for my use, and in replacing product for the shelves." You can contact Shari at animalanswersltd@gmail.com or check out her website at www.animalanswers.weebly.com.

Mike Owen recently established Owen Family Concessions Etc. Owen Family Concessions will operate a mobile concession trailer offering food and beverages. You can reach Mike by calling 641-590-0207 or e-mailing ofcetc@gmail.com. Mike used his NanoLoan to purchase small equipment for his business and for vendor registrations for events. Mike said "Ted Bair helped me take all the information I had on my concession business and focus it so I was ready to present my business plan to others. He also helped me understand to start small, succeed and then look at expanding."

The NanoLoan Program targets a specific, underserved segment of the entrepreneurial community: businesses in the 'pre-bankable' phase. NanoLoans up to \$2,500 can be used to move a business model farther along in its development by paying for prototype development, patents, equipment, working capital and other start up costs. Recipients are required to successfully complete an approved entrepreneurial training course that will expose them to key aspects of being a small business owner and help them put together a business plan.

North Central Mechanical (continued from page 1)

Praising the assistance he received from the Small Business Development Center, Bartels said, "Ted Bair and the SBDC have been very helpful in validating my concept and pulling all of this together, and I look forward to our continued relationship".

Bartels' reputation and good customer relations skills helped his company to grow quickly and in 2011, with advice from the SBDC, he was able to move his business from his home to a shop at 1411 S. Taft in Mason City. He also purchased additional equipment, more service trucks, and added five full-time positions, all to better serve his customers. As Nathan grows his business further, he knows he can return to the SBDC for more assistance.

For more information, contact North Central Mechanical Services Company at 641-424-4828.



Carla Day, owner of Cj's House Cleaning & Tidy Garden Care



Ted Bair and Shari Hampton, owner of Animal Answers



Ted Bair and Mike Owen, owner of Owen Family Concessions

Spring 2012 FastStart Graduates

Congratulations to the graduates of the Spring 2012 FastStart business course. Twenty-five entrepreneurs completed the comprehensive entrepreneurial training program designed to help new business people develop their business concept and business plan. As part of the curriculum, graduates go through all the steps in developing a business plan including feasibility, marketing, insurance and financing.

FastStart classes provide guidance and knowledge for the start-up entrepreneur and help put a new spin on improving a current owner's business. The participants evaluate and design a business concept, write a feasibility plan, discover approaches to marketing that create an understanding about the customer, and learn about pricing methods, along with various other topics.

The Spring 2012 FastStart graduates and their home towns include:

- Staci Ackerson, Bassett
- Lucinda Summers, Belmond
- Cody Lensing, Charles City
- Holly Windelow, Clear Lake
- Angie Huffman, Elma
- Dana Jones, Forest City
- Rachel Lynch, Garner
- Annette O'Donnell, Roland
- O'Donnell, Joice
- Kelly Meighan, Manly
- Allan Young, Rudd
- Hillary Bartell, Matt Bartell, Rhondi Easley, Alan Haugen, Jesse Huang, Linda Johnson, Melissa Kuhn, Kristy Neidlinger, David Ries, Eric Sauers, Susan Sauers, Mason City
- Scott Blanchard, Thornton
- Connie Farris, Sonny Farris, Ventura



Members of the Spring 2012 FastStart business class.



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10 Secrets to Success from *Investor's Business Daily*

Investor's Business Daily (IBD) has spent years analyzing leaders and successful people in all walks of life. Most have ten traits that, when combined, can turn dreams into reality.

1. **How you think is everything.** Always be positive. Think success, not failure. Beware of a negative environment.
2. **Decide upon your true dreams and goals.** Write down your specific goals and develop a plan to reach them.
3. **Take action.** Goals are nothing without action. Don't be afraid to get started. Just do it.
4. **Never stop learning.** Go back to school or read books. Get training and acquire skills.
5. **Be persistent and work hard.** Success is a marathon, not a sprint. Never give up.
6. **Learn to analyze details.** Get all the facts, all the input. Learn from your mistakes.
7. **Focus your time and money.** Don't let other people or things distract you.
8. **Don't be afraid to innovate; be different.** Following the herd is a sure way to mediocrity.
9. **Deal and communicate with people effectively.** No person is an island. Learn to understand and motivate others.
10. **Be honest and dependable; take responsibility.** Otherwise, numbers 1 through 9 won't matter.