

Business coach helping businesses expand, grow

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As part of the city of Imperial's economic development program, businesses and persons with ideas for businesses now have access to a "business coach," or consultant, to help them with their business plans.

Janeece Woofter has acted as a business coach to several businesses since the inception of the program last February.

She is the former owner of Cooper Dry Goods in both Imperial and Hoxie, Kan., and has a degree in Business Marketing.

Woofter works with Leslie Carlholm, Community Development Director for the city of Imperial. Her position and the economic development program are funded through the economic development portion of the city sales tax.

If a person wants to start up a business, or wants to expand one, the first step is to contact Carlholm.

"I give them a homework assignment to solidify their ideas. For example, if they want to start a new business but need a plan written, I send them to the Nebraska Business Development Center. Then, if they need help with marketing research, we have resources."

Carlholm continued, "If they have a business with the potential to grow, I refer them to Janeece. She's the 'big gun' as far as coaching strategy."

Carlholm said she's had outstanding feedback from those businesses she's referred to Woofter.

"She's a great resource and a great listener. This is a great use of sales tax money to support existing businesses," Carlholm said of the business coach.

Woofter said she works with all businesses in all parts of the growth cycle. The businesses she is now working with include food, supply, service and more.

Business coaching services she provides include reviewing technical assistance, marketing, growth plans, financing, market research, international trade, transition to a new owner, starting up and more.

Her job, she said, is "not to provide my personal expertise but to point them in the right direction. I brainstorm with the business owner and see what areas they find challenging, and match them with resources."

Woofter continued, "The program is designed to catch people with businesses in the back of their mind that they've never put together.

"I identify in what direction they need to go and the resources they need to get there," she said.

Woofter said the city is particularly interested in businesses with potential to grow, or new businesses.

The city also likes to address the challenges that prevent a business from growing in Imperial, she said. Those chal-

lenges can be capital, expertise, how to organize, how to create a web page, marketing, market research, bookkeeping and accounting.

"Small business owners are supposed to be an expert in everything," Woofter pointed out. They can't afford to hire experts in those fields, and must educate themselves in those fields.

Woofter has seen definite results in some of the businesses she's been working with, but it's a long-term process. "Six months is not long enough to start a plan and carry it out," she declared.

Since the program is not a year old yet, Woofter said she's "just going with it. I really enjoy it."

The coach has always been interested in business. Besides being in business for herself for 25 years, she takes classes in business coach training. She also was asked to teach a distance learning class through Mid-Plains Community College, "Advanced Business Plan Writing."

That class detailed everything, she said, and "really got me interested in the education part and how business practices have changed."

The city of Imperial has partnered with the USDA Rural Business Enterprise grant with the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Rawlins County Kansas Economic Development, and Mid-Plains Community College's Center for Enterprise to support the city's economic development program.



Janeece Woofter

