Grand Challenge: Community Vitality

Title: Shawnee StartUps e-Community Supports Entrepreneurs

Why is this issue important?
Businesses are the backbone of a strong community. Keeping businesses local means more wealth stays in the community and supports community development. According to the Small Business Administration, small businesses employ more than half of the working class in the United States. Local jobs keep people working — and spending — closer to home. However, many entrepreneurs struggle to find the funding to start or grow their business.

How did Extension address this issue?
Shawnee County Extension provides leadership to Shawnee StartUps, a NetWork Kansas e-Community. Guided by a local leadership team, Shawnee StartUps offers low-interest loans from $5000–$45,000 to qualified applicants. Loans must be paired with a loan from a financial institution and/or local/regional public source of capital.

What was the impact?
- Shawnee StartUps began in January 2017 and approved three loans during the first year in operation, all to minority owners.

Success Story:
Y’Sondra Dixon, owner of Essentia Salon & Spa, 5900 SW Huntoon, Suite A2, previously worked in a salon, and says that she is enjoying the freedom of making all the business decisions. “I love being a mentor and coach to my team and seeing the growth come from it. It has always been important for me to establish positive working relationships with all staff to ensure the work environment is at its best.”

Y’Sondra reports that since opening three months ago, they have had 546 clients in the business and 96% of those have become repeat clients. She credits Karl Klein and the Washburn Small Business Development Center with helping her fine tune her business plan and helping her find funding and grants through Go Topeka! and Shawnee StartUps. Her goal is to double their capacity by the end of the year.

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