

## Entrepreneurial Class Helps to Clear Fog of Doubt



**H**ow many would-be entrepreneurs have sat around the dinner table, mouth salivating over the centerpiece sauce whipped up just to impress the guests? At the sight of the home-made recipe, their eyes glaze over while thinking of commercial possibilities and

hands idly reach for spoons to taste its components over and over again, wondering if it would sell.

No one knows for sure, but Sue Strick of St. Croix Falls did have a similar experience two years ago. “One day we were sitting around the table eating my salsa on baked potatoes and we just started giggling about it,” says Sue. “Everybody thought my home-made salsa was fantastic—my daughter sneaked it out of the house to give to her friends.”

The epicurean salsa came about purely as an accident. While making the family recipe one day, Sue ran out of a primary ingredient and decided to use a substitute. It turned out to be inventive genius—the substituted ingredient pumped it up so that family and friends “went wild” over the new, tempestuous taste. In fact,



*Sue Strick in her kitchen, making her famous salsa.*

Sue had to make sure she brought along a few bottles of salsa wherever she went to keep up with the demand. Suzie’s family said, “You oughta sell this salsa, it’s so darn good.” That claim is also reproduced on her label, a slightly ribald, flirtatious promotion claiming “Suzie puts the SASS in SALSA!”

### Real-World Impacts from Entrepreneurial Training Classes

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, small businesses provide about 75% of the net new jobs and represent more than 99% of all employers. In Wisconsin, according to the U.S. Dept. of Labor, there were 12,025 new employer startups in 2001. Men who were 25 to 34 years old initiated most startups, although all adults were involved in entrepreneurship. Research shows that successful entrepreneurs are a key component to strong economies. Developing high-growth, high-wage companies is essential for Wisconsin to grow its per capita income. The Small Business Development Center helps attain this goal by providing entrepreneurial education, research, support and development. Because entrepreneurs generate a higher rate of return on public investment, it makes most sense to support and educate this special class of employers starting in the early planning stages of development.

Businesses assisted by the SBDC in 13 sites throughout the state increased sales by \$45.3 million incrementally, created 655 new jobs, and retained 52 other employees. These businesses also generated \$2.4 million in state tax revenues and obtained \$12.13 million in financing. Clients give their SBDC counselors high marks—on average, 4.5 on a five-point scale—for their knowledge and expertise.

## A Dose of Pragmatism

Still, she had qualms about the commercial viability of her product. She wanted to make sure she wouldn't "fall flat on my face" if she did start a business, so she contacted the UWEX Small Business Development Center at UW-River Falls. She enrolled in a six-week Entrepreneurial Training Grant program, co-sponsored by the state Dept. of Commerce. "The class really got the ball rolling for me," Sue said.

The entrepreneurial training class helped to fill knowledge gaps, allowing her to write an exceptional business plan, which in turn opened doors at lending institutions, a crucial step for many startups. The class also gave her that priceless sense of possibility, clearing away the doubts one-by-one and replacing them with sure-footed information and sound advice. Her first idle musings, skittish like deer in the city, vanished. "I really must say that starting out like this is such a big thing and to feel like you're going to be successful is so important," she said. "The class is such a beneficial thing, I felt a lot more comfortable."

Most small startups can't afford a panoply of experts, such as lawyers, accountants, marketing and branding experts, financial and human resource specialists. That's where the entrepreneurial training class can become pivotal, providing those experts as consultants and answering questions business owners may have about those areas. Usually about midway through the class, doubt starts to firm up into certainty as it clears speculation on whether a company is likely to make it or not.

## Making Fiery Inroads

Although Sue had started a business plan on her own, the class helped her to complete it. Finally, after two years of talking, planning and thinking about it, she



*Suzie's Sassy Salsa label.*

opened "Sauces Unlimited, LLC" in Baldwin last January. Her company subcontracts with a bottling firm to produce her recipe, an exuberant, sweet-spicy blend of fiery jalapeno, red and green peppers, tomatoes and onion, all grown in her own garden. She is working full-time as a program manager for K-Tek in Baldwin, but hopes to transition into her business full-time in the future.

Right now, she is concentrating on immediate marketing needs for the vivaciously popular sauce. She plans on selling to local restaurants, bar and grills, grocery stores, and at events sponsored locally and in the Twin Cities metro area.