

Long Beach

BUSINESS JOURNAL

March 1-14, 2011

City College Connects Business, Education And Workforce Development In Long Beach Area

LBCCD Small Business Development Lead Center Oversees Local Center And Beyond



Lou Anne Bynum, left, is the assistant superintendent and vice president of economic and resource development for the Long Beach Community College District (LBCCD), while Sheneui Weber is the executive director development, who helps operate the Small Business Development Center and manages the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program at LBCCD. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

■ By **TIFFANY RIDER**
Staff Writer

At the Long Beach Community College District (LBCCD), workforce and economic development come together through and Small Business Development Center (SBDC), a program funded partially by the U.S. Small Business Administration that assists small business owners and those wishing to start a business. Since the program began locally a few years ago, it has proven a huge success in creating new businesses, helping firms expand, adding thousands of new jobs and attracting statewide and national attention.

According to Lou Anne Bynum, the assistant superintendent and vice president for the college's office of economic and resource development, the district has a primary mission to assist students in achieving their academic goals, to operate a workforce development program that keeps individuals' skills current and to connect business development, which helps businesses grow and remain competitive in the local economy.

Bynum is responsible for bringing the SBDC program to the college. The district had the opportunity to apply for the program when a vacancy occurred in 2005, and thus went through a competitive process to be able to offer the program's free business advising and low-cost workshops for small business owners and entrepreneurs. The district began its first yearly contract as a lead center with the SBA in 2006. Only existing programs can renew by application, which includes a budget proposal and operation plan for the year.

The Los Angeles Regional SBDC Network is managed by what is known as a "Lead Center," which happens to be located on the Liberal Arts Campus of Long Beach City College. The local lead center is the seventh largest nationally funded and the largest regionally funded SBDC of the six lead centers in California, managing SBDC service centers in Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

The service centers within the regional network are located at College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita, El Camino College in the South Bay Area, Santa Monica College in West Los Angeles, Pacific Coast Regional in Downtown Los Angeles, Mt. San Antonio College in Irwindale and Ventura College. Long Beach City College also has its own SBDC, or sub center, to serve the local community – a critical reason for the college to go after the program in the first place, Bynum said.

Sheneui Weber is currently the regional director of the lead center and reports to Bynum. Weber is in charge of all economic development opportunities and oversees the regional SBDC network from the lead center. The lead center's annual budget is \$7 million, split between SBA funding \$3.5 million annually with matching dollars from local, state and private entities. The lead center subcontracts with its service centers, which must then match the dollars the lead center funds them with to be able to provide its services. "Essentially we're like the prime contractor, and all the service centers are subs to us," Weber said.

Each service center has a business library where business owners can do research or reading, and is staffed by administrators and

personal advisors who provide business advice for free. Business owners interested in receiving advice should call and make an appointment, Weber said, so staff can not only gather as much information as possible about the business, but also match the business with the most appropriate adviser.

“There’s a whole, what we call ‘intake process’ that we take our clients through just so that we have a good understanding of what they are trying to achieve,” Weber said. The first thing a client must do is complete a request for services form that includes standard questions about the business, such as size, number of employees, demographics, location, industry type and so on.

The second step is the actual appointment with a business advisor, who spends the first hour talking to the business owner or entrepreneur, asking a lot of questions about their business to understand what their situation is. After that, a scope of work is developed to work with the small business owner on, she said. Business advising is completely free of charge.

The lead center is on Twitter and Facebook and links to its sub centers. Several centers offer social media marketing workshops – one of the more popular workshops for business owners and entrepreneurs, Weber said. “We’re trying to keep up with the times like everybody else,” she said. “To do social media, you have to at least have a Web site and you have to be easy to find.” Some SBDC workshops are free, but most range in price from \$20 to \$75 per person.

The network’s success is measured by performance and economic impact, such as the number of jobs created as a direct result of working with the network. Weber said they also track the dollar amount the SBDC helps small businesses access, how many businesses the program helps start, increases in sales, assistance with contracts and other measures.

The service centers combined see more 6,000 clients a year. With the help of the network, about 150 businesses are started each year, with more than 1,000 jobs created, Weber said. The network also hosts at least one training event per week. “We also provided \$40 million in capital between SBA and non-SBA loans,” Weber said.

Small Business Development Center Community Outreach And Participation

According to Bynum, just about everyone on her staff in workforce and economic development are connected with the organizations they are working to serve. For example, Bynum is a past president of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce. She has been on the chamber board for a number of years, and also served on the City of Long Beach Economic Development Commission.

“It’s important for people involved in this work to be involved with the organizations that are moving the agendas forward for workforce development,” she said. “. . . I think that’s something that other community colleges kind of miss – that they don’t have people engaged with businesses having a discussion when the needs are being discussed. By the time they get a program together and decide how they are going to respond, they miss the boat.”

According to Weber, the SBDC staff works with many different partners in the Long Beach area, including the Port of Long Beach and the City of Long Beach. Municipalities, particularly city utility companies, have contractual obligations with the government but also do a lot of outreach to small businesses, Bynum said. Another partner is the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation. Bynum said L.A. County has the highest concentration of small businesses in the nation “with a little under 500,000 small businesses, as defined by the SBA.”

The program’s newest partner is California State University, Los Angeles School of Engineering. “They’ve joined the network and their folks are putting together the specialty program focused on

technology and commercialization of technology for small businesses,” Weber said.

The goal of all of this, Weber said, is to develop, specifically in the technology sector. “As a specialty area I think it’s very important for this region,” she said. “We’re essentially looking at expanding our service capacity and also focusing more on the minority business community.”

Bynum noted the SBDC has business advisors who speak Spanish and Khmer to be able to work with the Hispanic and Cambodian populations around the Long Beach area.

“The goal is to really be the highest performing network in the entire country,” Bynum said. “It will take us a while to get there, but that’s what we’re strategically focused on – to be able to serve as many businesses as possible.”

LBCC Uses Program Leverage To Expand Service Opportunities

Bynum credits Weber for single-handedly leveraging the opportunity for the college to participate in the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program that provides educational opportunities for business owners to determine how to strengthen their bottom lines and add jobs.

The national program provides \$500 million for national small business owner education, with \$200 million set aside for community colleges all over the country. LBCC was the second test site for the program, and Goldman Sachs is scheduled to roll it out to other community colleges in the next year or so. The first cohort of business owner students from LBCC graduated in December 2010.

“We were able to get that program because we have the infrastructure of the Los Angeles Regional Network for the SBDCs,” Bynum said. “It took quite a few years to get that implemented. Sheneui was a wonder woman, literally.”

Weber worked on the design and implementation of how the program would be at LBCC, but it took quite a few years to get it implemented because the SBDC network was still in the accreditation process – an element Bynum said was critically important to the program’s strength. “You can’t really function well unless you go through an accreditation process, and it’s a pretty extensive accreditation process by the Association of Small Business Development out of Washington,” Bynum said. “But because of that infrastructure, our president was approached for the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program.”

Now that the college has the Goldman Sachs program on top of an accredited SBDC program, Bynum said they are attracting even more attention. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) chose LBCC to be the only college in California to test a pilot project that may fuel new business creation.

The Mott Foundation has fronted \$995,500 to test a virtual incubator network at 10 community colleges across the nation. According to a press release from the AACC, the network will test new delivery mechanisms for on-site business support in order to not depend on a brick-and-mortar facility. Mechanisms could include webinars and utilizing social media and other virtual platforms. Bynum said they are scheduled to attend an April meeting for more information on project implementation.

“We leveraged our network to work with the 10,000 Small Businesses program, and we leveraged that for this incubator opportunity that we’ve got,” she said. “It takes an awful lot of work to put that infrastructure in place and bring those things to Long Beach. If we didn’t have the network, we wouldn’t have gotten these other opportunities, and it’s getting national attention for us now.” ■