



Cut Out for Success

UF students create strategic plan for local business, K&K Ornamental

When 32 upper-level business students enrolled in a business research class taught by S. Chris Ward, Ed.D., assistant professor of business, in fall 2006, they thought they were just filling another requirement for graduation. What they ended up getting was invaluable experience in the realities of operating a small business.

Students in UF's College of Business took part in NxLevel Training for Entrepreneurs, a program that connects area small business owners with business students. The first of its kind in the state of Ohio, the program is a product of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Rhodes State College

and aims to help students learn more about entrepreneurship while assisting small business owners.

Ward worked with Craig Brown, Rhodes State College SBDC counselor, to secure the necessary approvals and course materials to bring the comprehensive training to UF business students. The Findlay Chamber of Commerce Small Business Advisory Council, Dan Yates, Ph.D., assistant professor of business, and Ward financed course materials.

Ward taught the research class in the fall, and Yates taught the second session in the spring. "The students were very committed to helping their owners make

improvements. Many of their ideas were well received,” said Yates of the students’ work with area business owners.

Students April Krout and Joanna Sabato, both of whom graduated in May 2007, and senior Corey Redmond were part of a team, formed during the fall semester, that was assigned to work with Russ and Nancy Krout who own and operate K&K Ornamental, a metal fabrication business started in 2006 in Findlay. The Krouts use a plasma cutter to create intricate designs in metal, which can then be used for business signs, decorative items, trailer hitches, sports memorabilia – almost anything their customers can dream up.

Through a series of meetings with the Krouts and in-class direction from Ward, the students created a complete business plan. “I don’t think there’s any question they didn’t address – right down to getting rid of the scrap metal,” said Russ.

After completing extensive market research on the industry and its growth potential, both locally and online, and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the business, the student team developed a complete business plan with a month-by-month action plan. Nancy and Russ plan to implement all aspects of it.

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Nancy was impressed not only by the students’ enthusiasm but also by their ability to listen to her needs as a small business owner. “A big part of serving your customers is listening,” she said, “and they have done that very well.”

April Krout, whose last name is coincidentally the same as the business owners, recognized the value in the project. “It really taught me a lot about working with peers as well as professionals. We got to visit the business and work hand-in-hand with Russ and Nancy to develop some new and creative ideas for their business. I think we were able to provide them with some very good information that they will be able to use as they continue to grow their business over the next few years,” she said.

Even after the semester ended, Krout, Redmond and Sabato continued to work with K&K Ornamental. According to Ward, the students “went over and above” in pursuing the project after the class officially ended in December 2006.

In April, the students were accepted as presenters at UF’s Symposium for Scholarship and Creativity. Their presentation, titled “Partnering Small Business Owners and Students = Success,” detailed the challenges and research involved in creating the business plan.

In addition, the three were asked to be the only student presenters at a small business expo in Columbus, Ohio, hosted by the SBDC of Ohio in March. According to Ward, other SBDC regions plan to use the University’s program as a benchmark to develop similar programs around the state. “I am so proud of our students,” said Ward. “They spoke from their hearts about their experience, and people were impressed. The students really saw value in this real-world project.”

Ward and Yates plan to continue the NxLevel Training for Entrepreneurs at the University, connecting students with real-world business experiences.



Corey Redmond, Joanna Sabato and April Krout share the details of the business plan they developed for K&K Ornamental with owner Russ Krout.