

Business Section

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Mind your own business

By **SARAH COLWELL THE GAZETTE**

Two years ago, Bob Holmes lost his high-tech job and at 54, he just didn't have the heart to climb the corporate ladder again. He decided instead to become his own boss.



Holmes, who had a master's degree in business, thought he knew enough to get started. But he struggled when writing a business plan and finding financing. He was close to giving up until he went to the Colorado Springs SCORE office.

*Daisy, from left, Riley, Oliver, Sunny and Lily napped at Canine Campus last week. Canine Campus, formerly Top Dog Daycare, was the first dog day care to open in the Pikes Peak region. Co-owner Joelle Hilfers said SCORE volunteers steered her in the right direction to get the business up and running. (KRISTIN GOODE, THE GAZETTE)*

A counselor from the group of 34 volunteer retired executives helped him develop a business plan, get financing from a local bank and gave him the emotional support he needed to pursue his plan.

Friday, Holmes opened Whistling Pines Gun Club near Marksheffel Road and Highway 24, with 855 members already registered. He plans to open a second location in northern Colorado Springs soon.

"I would not have gotten past 'gee, this is a wonderful idea' phase," if it hadn't been for help from SCORE, he said.

Being a small-business owner offers the potential for great rewards. But as Holmes and lots of other entrepreneurs have found, it doesn't come without risks and challenges.

Three organizations that operate locally, SCORE, the Small Business Development Center and the Chamber of Commerce, offer help to the budding entrepreneurs and small-business owners who could use some expert advice.

There are 15,027 businesses with 49 employees or fewer in the Colorado Springs metropolitan statistical area, which equates to 95.3 percent of all business, according to the 2004 report by the U.S. Census Bureau. Businesses with 499 employees or fewer constitute 99.8 percent — a whopping 15,725 — of all businesses in the Colorado Springs area.

The U.S. Small Business Administration defines a small business as one with fewer than 500 employees or \$5 million in sales. The Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce considers small businesses to be companies with 50 employees or fewer.

SCORE and the Small Business Development Center offer mostly free services that target common problems of smallbusiness owners. SCORE is funded by the SBA, while the SBDC is funded by the SBA, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and others.

The Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, whose membership is made up mostly of small businesses, conducts programs and classes for small-business owners.

SCORE, the Service Corps of Retired Executives, holds monthly workshops but focuses more on one-on-one counseling.

Its retired executives volunteer their time to work with small-business owners on business plans, marketing strategies, bookkeeping and other business-related topics. The counseling is free.

That expert advice is what was most valuable to Gene Sanchez, owner of Zehcnas Inc., an integrated IT and telecom company.

“They have a lot of experienced individuals who have been through it already,” he said. “I’m finding that I’m not alone in dealing with these challenges.”

Counselors with SCORE helped Joelle Hilfers, co-owner of Canine Campus (formerly Top Dog Daycare), navigate the maze of government paperwork to get her business running more than 10 years ago. The company now has five franchises across the country.

“They steered us in the right direction locally on how to get a business license and state license, which we had no clue about,” Hilfers said.

Prospective small-business owners often just need to bounce their ideas off an experienced veteran, said Harold Larson, chairman of SCORE.

“A lot of the time, we provide them with the emotional support they need, getting them prepared for what they might encounter along the way,” Larson said.

The Small Business Development Center, another smallbusiness resource, is located at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. It specializes in workshops, most of which are \$15. It also provides free one-on-one counseling and has a small, lending library.

SBDC workshop topics include deciding to start a small business, bookkeeping, how to win government contracts, how to franchise your business and more.

Fifty-seven percent of the SBDC clients are prospective small-business owners.

“If they get stuck, we walk them through to the next hurdle,” said Matt Barrett, executive director of the SBDC.

Help from the SBDC includes how get a business license, write a business plan and do other paperwork needed to get the business operational. The organization also helps a business secure financing.

“We’ve had clients who said they were kind of laughed out the door when they went to a bank for a loan,” Barrett said. “Then they came to us, and we assist them with writing their business plan, and once they took that back to the bank, they got approval.”

So far this year, the SBDC has helped small businesses obtain more than \$1 million in loans.

In 2005, the SBA’s regional office guaranteed 213 loans for a total of \$47 million in Colorado Springs, said Chris Chavez, SBA spokesman in Denver. The SBA does not make the loan, but rather guarantees the loan for the bank.

About 43 percent of SBDC clients own a business. The organization can help small-business owners look for government contracts, learn how to export goods overseas and do business with Wal-Mart.

The Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce works with the SBA on a regional and national level to better track how local small businesses do compared with small businesses across the nation. The Chamber is working on a program to train more local banks to be SBA loan providers.

The Chamber also started a Business Education Alliance to create a one-stop shop of educational needs for small-business owners. Members include the chamber, the Better Business Bureau of Southern Colorado, the SBDC, the Center for Nonprofit Excellence, Pikes Peak Library District, Pikes Peak Workforce Center, Office of International Affairs and SCORE.

## RESOURCES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Business Education Alliance Web site: [www.springs-smallbiz.com](http://www.springs-smallbiz.com)

Small Business Development Center

- 262-3844 c [www.coloradosbdc.org](http://www.coloradosbdc.org)

University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

- 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway P.O. Box 7150 Colorado Springs, CO 80933

## SCORE

- 636-3074 c [www.coloradospringsscore.org](http://www.coloradospringsscore.org)

- 2 N. Cascade Ave., suite 110 Colorado Springs, CO 80903

## ABOUT SMALL BUSINESSES

- Small businesses make up 97.7 percent of all Colorado employers.

- There are more than 493,886 small businesses in Colorado.

- Small businesses create more than 50 percent of the American nonfarm, private gross domestic product.

- Colorado saw an estimated 23,694 new small companies with employees start up in the last year measured.

- Small businesses employ 51.3 percent of Colorado's nonfarm private-sector workers

- Small patenting firms produce 13 to 14 times more patents per employee than large patenting firms.

Source:

The U.S. Small Business Administration