

"Library to Business" offers small businesses range of aid

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CHEYENNE—Since it launched in March 2013, the Laramie County Library's "Library to Business" program has been helping dozens of local small-business owners, entrepreneurs and nonprofits navigate the ins and outs of the business world.

And as word of the program has been spreading, the library has been taking a larger role among the business community in Cheyenne, featuring classes, workshops and even one-on-one training.

County Librarian Lucie Osborn said that while the Library to Business program has only been in place for a year and a half, the idea behind it had been around since before the library's current building was completed in 2007.

"It just had never been quite the right time. There were always other priorities that took precedent," Osborn said. "But we knew there were holes that the library could help to fill, providing businesses and entrepreneurs the services to help them be successful. As the largest library in the state, we see a responsibility and a role to provide leadership in this area."

Rachel Svoboda is the business services coordinator for the library and has been running Library to Business since June 2013. Coming

To get support

Entrepreneurs, small-business owners and jobseekers interested in learning what the Laramie County Library's "Library to Business" program can do for them can learn more at the program's website, <http://www.lclsonline.org/adults/l2b>. Individual consultations can also be scheduled by contacting Rachel Svoboda at 773-7200 or l2b@lclsonline.org.

from a business background herself, Svoboda said there are many tools the library can provide to help small-business owners, if only they knew about them.

"When you're a small-business owner, you wear a lot of hats," Svoboda said. "We want them to know that they're not in this alone."

Workshops have been a major component of Library to Business. The library generally hosts three or four workshops each month, focusing on a wide range of topics, such as how to apply for grants, how to market a small business effectively and how to secure contracts with government agencies, among others.

"In September, we were able to have David Leavitt from the U.S. Small Business Association come in here," Svoboda said. "He gave a great presentation called 'The Business of

Art,' where he went through an artist's statement—if you want to sell your art, what does that look like? Very practical, on-the-ground tools for our local artists."

A part-time artist himself, Leavitt said the workshop turned out to be as much of a networking event as it was an educational experience.

"What I found out about Cheyenne is that artists there feel like they're kind of a lost tribe, that artists don't necessarily have a vehicle to dialogue with each other," Leavitt said. "So that worked out to a really good, productive dialogue, and I noticed a lot of people exchanging business cards afterward."

Svoboda said Library to Business also makes a fair share of referrals to other agencies, and those referrals have strengthened the communication between the library and various entities like SBA, the Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Center at Laramie County Community College.

"When someone comes in and we have an individual consultation, I can show them all the resources we have at the library, but I can also point them in the direction of outside agencies," Svoboda said.

Library: It's a "one-stop shop" for businesses

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"We not only encompass entrepreneurs and small businesses, but I also get job seekers I can send out to Workforce Services, and I can send them to LCCC to work with their programs as well – they'll teach someone how to write a business plan," Svoboda said.

In one-on-one consultations, Svoboda said she can talk a prospective entrepreneur through how to use the library's databases, which include thousands of business and economic journals, market and industry reports, and individual information on tens of millions of businesses.

"It's all free with their library card, and they don't even realize what amazing resources they have at their fingertips," Svoboda said.

"It's so much fun to sit with somebody and show them how, on this particular database, I can show you samples of business plans. It really takes that edge off the stress of starting a small business."

Dave Rippe is a counselor with SCORE, a local firm that helps startups and existing small businesses. He has spoken at Library to Business events in the past and said the

feedback he's gotten has been positive. But more than that, he said Library to Business is providing an important service to the community, and he expects it to continue growing as its schedule fills.

"I think it's very useful, and I think it's going to be even more useful in the future," he said.

"People who are having business problems, they can find things that are tailored to their needs. I think it's going to grow in popularity and become an important fixture in our business community."

Paul Lindsey, an executive search consultant, said he taught a class for Library to Business on how to use LinkedIn, a business-oriented social networking service. He said the library has effectively made itself into a "one-stop shop" for small business advice through the program, which he said can be especially useful in a state as rural as Wyoming.

"I think it's a really good thing," Lindsey said. "Businesses are smaller here, and I think it's great that they can come in there and get some one-on-one direct counseling."