

# The LINK News

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## Small businesses receive help

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# Small businesses receiving help for free

### Patty Booth-O'Neill

It's not easy being a small business these days. And for those in this area who were impacted by Superstorm Sandy, it's even harder.

The New Jersey Small Business Development Center at Brookdale Community College (NJSBDC) established in 1979, is helping those businesses still struggling, (doesn't have to be from Sandy) and it's in ways some people were not expecting.

"They helped me take my business to the next level," said Mary McDonnell, owner of The Stone Hut in Pier Village. She got her business back up and running after Sandy, but knew she needed something more.

Before getting help from NJSBDC, McDonnell insisted she would never take her business to the Internet and was unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the idea.

But that's exactly what kind of help NJSBDC is there to provide.

"They helped me get a website up and running and on Ecommerce, where I sell my merchandise on line," McDonnell said.

She also said it put her on right track to save a lot of money. "I was spending thousands of dollars mailing out postcards to customers when we had sales or special events." She now emails her customers the information.

The NJSBDC network offers services and programs for small businesses in New Jersey, helping businesses expand their operations, manage their growth or start new ventures.

NJSBDC employs an expert staff and practicing business consultants who help small business

owners and entrepreneurs develop business plans, find financing, identify new markets, find procurement and international trade opportunities, commercialize technology and develop an E-commerce presence.

Jackeline Mejias-Fuertes, is the Director of the NJSBDC at Brookdale, which serves Monmouth and Ocean counties.

Consultants have backgrounds in many different areas, including business management, legal, accounting, marketing, CPA and much more.

In 2011, Mejias-Fuertes was observing a seminar conducted by Lisa Kanda, owner of eIKay Corporate Advisor, an expert in business, marketing and coaching strategies. She was so impressed with Lisa's knowledge, she asked her to join the NJSBDC team.

Lisa is becoming a familiar face among businesses in Long Branch.

"I take a proactive role in Long Branch because it's my backyard," Kanda said. "I'm an advocate for small businesses and I want to get help to as many businesses as I can."

Kanda meets with small business owners and makes an assess-

ment of their needs and tries to take them to the next step. Some, like Bob LaBella, owner of Jamm Printing in Long Branch, wasn't ready for social media, but was put in touch with different members of the team who could help him bring in more business.

"They helped me focus on how to bring business in better than I had been," LaBella said. "I had to re-evaluate my marketing plan."

"It's all about building a strong foundation," Kanda said.

"After Sandy hit we didn't have power for two weeks," said LINK News owner/publisher, Patty O'Neill. "People from the state had offices in Long Branch and were walking around the streets, going into businesses asking if they needed help. And I said, 'Yes, I do.'"

O'Neill went to the SBA office in the firehouse on Union Ave.

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NJSBDC consultant Lisa Kanda goes over strategies with Joe LaBella, owner of Jamm Printing in Long Branch.

On front page: Stone Hut owner Mary McDonnell goes over Ecommerce merchandise with Jackeline Mejias-Fuertes and Kanda.

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and filled out paperwork. "And they lost it. So I filled it out again, and they needed something else," O'Neill said. "That went on and on for months. At that point they were wasting my time, and time is money."

One day Kanda asked O'Neill if she needed help. "She explained that she was with the NJSBDC, but I was confused and leary. For months after Sandy I had been on line looking into so many organizations for help, I didn't know one acronym from another," O'Neill said.

But Lisa went to The LINK office and instructed Patty on what she needed to do with her website, Facebook, Twitter and other social media avenues. "I learned some amazing things, and what one person couldn't tell me, there's another consultant who can."

The best thing, O'Neill said, is that they don't consider helping you a one shot deal. "They help you as many times as you need it."

"Since Sandy, we've helped over 225 businesses in Monmouth and Ocean counties," said Mejias-Fuertes. "We are not here to do the work for business owners; we teach people how to do things themselves."

This non-profit network is a federal-state-educational partnership, leveraging public and private funding sources to further maximize resources for the small business community. The network leverages funding from the Small Business Administration (SBA), New Jersey State Government, the educational institutions that host the 12 centers as well as other private sponsorships and grants.