



Strengthening minority and women-owned businesses in the region

Newsletter

June 2008

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Now accepting nominations for the 5th Annual Bridging the Gap Achievement Awards!

Click here to fill out a nomination form.

Community Law Center's small business legal services project & youth entrepreneurship initiative

By Dorcas Gilmore, Esq.

People who want to open a new business can quickly become overwhelmed. This can often cause the new entrepreneur to postpone facing basic legal requirements such as zoning approval, building permits, employment contracts, sales tax reporting, use and occupancy and health department licenses, and so on. Unfortunately, failure to navigate the legal framework in which any business must operate means many new businesses are either shut down or voluntarily dissolved rather than face seemingly endless legal requirements. Business owners with resources have attorneys to handle all of these requirements for them or to set them on the right path, but what about those who cannot afford \$300 an hour for a private attorney? For these entrepreneurs operating in Baltimore City, the Community Law Center offers the services of its Small Business Legal Services Project, to help level the playing field.

Recent clients of the Project include an optical business providing affordable eye glasses and contact lenses; a temporary agency for health care professionals; a hair salon; and a nonprofit organization providing holistic services to assist individuals with job retention. Thanks to the legal expertise these businesses were able to obtain from the Community Law Center, they are off to a solid start.

Several of these businesses were started by people with special skills who have dreamed of operating their own business for a long time, others are started by people who have been laid off and are using unfortunate circumstances as a chance to start over, and others are finding their way toward doing what they love for a living. These businesses currently employ 1-5 people each, and each business has its own story.

Join Bridging the Gap's online inventory:

Help majority businesses identify minority owned businesses with whom they can do business

Provide information on the experience and capacity of your business

Businesses will use the inventory as a resource in making purchasing decisions

Market your business to mid and large sized companies throughout the greater Baltimore region by completing an application today!

If you are a GBC member and would like to find out more about becoming a member of the Bridging the Gap committee, please contact:

Kisha Lashley
 Director, Bridging the Gap
 410-727-2820 ext. 19
 kishal@gbc.org

One such story is of a beauty salon owned and operated by a Liberian immigrant. The beauty salon was a dream over eleven years in the making. The entrepreneur had her own salon in her native country of Liberia, and upon immigrating to the United States she knew her goal was to once again run her own hair salon. She worked for over ten years getting her cosmetology training transferred from Liberia, taking the state cosmetology license exam, learning new techniques to work with diverse clientele, and supporting her family as a stylist at a local salon. Along her journey, this entrepreneur was determined to succeed. She purchased equipment and stored it knowing that one day her dream would come true.

The Small Business Legal Services Project helped her form a limited liability company, navigate local permitting requirements, and become familiar with potential future challenges. Her case is a perfect example of a hardworking, prepared entrepreneur who, without reduced-cost legal services, might have had all her careful plans derailed. With the help of the Community Law Center's Small Business Legal Services Project, this entrepreneur's dream of once again being a business owner is a reality—her beauty salon is open for business and contributing to the revitalization of her neighborhood.

The Community Law Center's Small Business Legal Services Project will be accepting new clients starting in September of 2008. At that time, please contact the Small Business Legal Services Project if you have started or wish to start a business. We help clients choose their business entity (for example, LLC or corporation) and protect their copyrights and other intellectual property. We also draft contracts, review commercial leases, assist with financing documents and negotiations, and help with other general business legal matters. The Project charges a \$100 application fee and a discounted, sliding-scale rate for services. Potential clients must fill out an Application for Legal Services with details about their businesses before meeting with an attorney.

The Small Business Legal Services Project & Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative also provide legal services to youth who aspire to be entrepreneurs or are currently operating their own businesses. The Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative expands the Small Business Legal Services Project by providing legal education and legal counsel to low-income youth in Baltimore. This initiative uniquely empowers youth to become successful micro and small business people by giving them the free legal counsel necessary to develop viable ventures.

Please contact the Community Law Center to request an application form or learn more information at 410-366-0922 or visit our Web site.

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