

## Greenville is the place to be for small businesses

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Small business activity is essential to the U.S. economy, as was demonstrated in the not so distant past. A report to the President from the U.S. Small Business Administration shows how it was the small business sector that emerged as a leader in pulling the United States out of its economic downturn in 2003. But as essential as small business is to the national economy, it probably holds more importance at the local level.

The 2004 County Business Patterns data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows Greenville County had 11,744 establishments with paid employees. Of those, 93.9 percent had fewer than 50 employees.

Similarly, 87 percent of the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce's members are businesses that employ 50 individuals or less. These smaller businesses in our area help fill niche markets, bring innovation and individuality to our community and help define the personality of the Greenville area. Continued strong growth of our community and the quality of life it offers requires an environment that fosters small business activity and fortunately, we live in a community that does just that.

I moved here from south Florida about five years ago and started my own business a year ago. Like many others, I had long wanted to pursue the American Dream through entrepreneurship but never felt comfortable enough to act upon that desire, despite having worked in the corporate world for more than 20 years. It wasn't until I had settled in Greenville that I felt compelled to explore starting my own company. While it was certainly a sometimes scary proposition to leave the security of an executive position at a large employer like ScanSource Inc., I quickly found I had a lot of support within the Greenville community to take this leap of faith.

As my plans to become a small business owner developed, I was amazed at how many people were accessible and more than willing to help me. I felt as if I had discovered a whole new world -- the world of small business.

Numerous small business owners provided me with individual advice, networking assistance and referrals and necessary professional services. I was encouraged to not only join, but to become active in, groups such as the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce, the downtown Greenville International Rotary Club and the Commerce Club, which have expanded my network significantly. A number of other groups focus on and support women in business, such as the Greenville Professional Women's Forum, Greenville International Alliance for Professional Women, Dynamic Women Express Network and the new yW Empowerment Center at the YWCA.

Add to these the additional resources provided through the Small Business Development Center and some terrific Web sites, including [business.clemson.edu/centers/sbdc/sbdc](http://business.clemson.edu/centers/sbdc/sbdc), [sba.gov](http://sba.gov), [score.org](http://score.org) and [dol.gov](http://dol.gov) and I was confident I could develop a successful business.

And, one year later, I can proudly say I did. I believe part of the reason small businesses have such an impact on the local economy is that small business owners, including me, prefer to do business with and support other small businesses. Just as effective, networking is all about building relationships, people prefer to do business with people they know.

While I'm only one of a large number of small business owners, I have to say thanks to this community for taking a transplant from Florida and offering encouragement, resources and support so that I could actually see my own American Dream come true. Please continue to support those who are interested in becoming small business owners, or who are already operating small businesses, so that we can continue to sustain a vibrant, growing local community and economy.