



Tacoma SBDC

2017 ECONOMIC IMPACT



SBDC Advisors Make a Difference

	2017	2008—2017
Small Businesses Helped by the SBDC	87	792
Jobs Created & Saved in the Community	19	190
Capital Formation	\$2,264,800	\$31,533,901

Economic impacts are self-reported and client-verified.



"If it weren't for [my advisor] I probably wouldn't still be in business."
Danelle Hillman, Owner

Tacoma Cheesecake is sweet success for Puyallup entrepreneur

PUYALLUP, Wash.--When Danelle Hillman found herself unemployed with a young daughter to support and another mortgage payment due, she cried for a week and then put her faith in God and a 20-year-old cheesecake recipe.

That was three years ago. Today she is the owner of Tacoma Cheesecake, a frozen, chocolate-dipped, cheesecake on a stick dessert that is sold in more than 500 grocery stores across the Pacific Northwest. In early 2018, she'll be picking up an additional 500 stores in California, a huge step toward her goal of selling Tacoma Cheesecake across the country and maybe around the world.

"I love walking into a store and seeing Tacoma Cheesecake on the shelf," she said. "I love seeing the smile on people's faces when they taste it."

In her commercial kitchen in Puyallup, she has seven employees mixing, baking, cooling, cutting, dipping and freezing more than 8,000 cheesecake bars every week. In January, production will bump up to 16,000 bars a week.

Hillman first came up with her cheesecake recipe in the early 1990s when she was an officer with the Tacoma Police Department and she baked to relax. She left law enforcement to open a dessert shop in Dupont in 2003. Her business skills did not match

her baking skills, and in 2007 she had to declare bankruptcy. She was also facing a difficult divorce.

When her business closed, Hillman went back to law enforcement, but she was always looking for a more family-friendly occupation for a single mom. Finally, Hillman decided she'd never find something else while she was working full-time (with a two-hour commute) so she quit.

She cried for a week, she said, but then she heard God say, "Hello!? You make cheesecake!"

One of the first things she did was call John Rodenberg, a certified business advisor with the Washington Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to set up a meeting. "I had failed my first business and I knew if I didn't do things differently I was not going to make it," she said.

In July 2015, she started selling cheesecake and other desserts at the Puyallup Farmer's Market and at various community events.

People loved her cheesecake, but she knew she was losing customers who didn't want to walk around carrying a piece of cheesecake on a plate and fumbling with a plastic fork. She rolled out cheesecake on a stick and it took off. Then came the idea to package her product and sell to grocery stores.

In the fall of 2016 she moved into her own 1,700-square-foot commercial kitchen and rebranded her company as Tacoma Cheesecake, selling Classic, Double Chocolate and Peanut Butter Bliss.

Hillman said her basic recipes have changed very little, but her business is constantly evolving, and Rodenberg has been a big part of that growth. "John is really a numbers guy and he's helped me get better at it, too," she said.

"Danelle has the baking talent, the marketing ability and the drive to succeed," Rodenberg said, but what she needed, and got from the SBDC, was a standard approach to cost analysis and sales versus costs so that she could determine her breakeven.

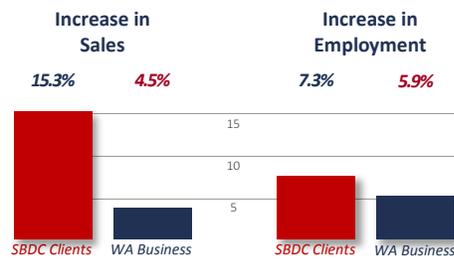
"If it weren't for John I probably wouldn't still be in business," she said.

"It's all in the numbers," she said. "You have to trust the numbers."

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Washington SBDC Performance

Clients vs. state average



Independent Annual Survey Source: Dr. James Chrisman, Mississippi State University

\$4:\$1

For every \$1 invested in the Washington SBDC program, our clients generate \$4.37 in incremental tax revenue.

Washington SBDC Locations



The Washington SBDC is a partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration, Washington State University's Office of Research and other Washington institutions of higher education and economic development organizations.