SUCCESS STORY: Skagit Hand Therapy, Mount Vernon, WA

Sometimes you have to be the change you want to see.

Donna Klein had been an occupational therapist specializing in hand therapy for more than 20 years and had worked under a variety of management structures. In 2016 she began managing a busy practice, along with seeing patients, and she realized she enjoyed the business side of the work as well.

Life was good, but she knew it could be better—for her and her patients, and for several of her colleagues, as well. In early 2018 she went to them with a proposal to start a small, locally-owned hand therapy clinic in Mount Vernon. “I think I can make a better life for all of us if we do this,” she said. They agreed, so Klein began the work of creating Skagit Hand Therapy.

But there was a problem. Klein couldn’t get financing without a business plan and she didn’t think she had the time or expertise to create one. In late February she contacted an online business plan service. Unfortunately, the plan she got back was incomplete and inaccurate. Then, on the advice of a friend, she called the Washington Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for assistance.

She began meeting with Cindy Brooks, the SBDC advisor in Mount Vernon. The Washington SBDC is a network of more than two dozen business advisors who work in communities across the state to assist business owners who want to start, grow or transition a business.

Klein credits Brooks with not only helping her with the business plan, but with helping her think through myriad issues about how she wanted to structure her business. The two spent about 10 hours working together over the course of a couple weeks and in late April Klein submitted her loan application to several banks. A few weeks later she learned that Heritage Bank had approved her for a $150,000 line of credit.

Skagit Hand Therapy opened for business in August in offices co-located with Balance Point Physical Therapy. She was joined by Neil Plume, also a certified hand therapist, and they now have five people working in support positions. Klein also has a bookkeeper, accountant and payroll service.

A lot of people have helped Klein get where she is now, but Cindy Brooks at the Washington SBDC was a big part of it. “I could not have done it without her,” Klein said. “Thank you isn’t enough.”

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Cindy Brooks
Certified Business Advisor
204 W Montgomery
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
360-336-6114
Cindy.Brooks@wsbdc.org

Cindy Brooks is one of more than two dozen SBDC advisors across the state who work one-on-one with small business owners who want to start, grow or buy/sell a business. Brooks, who was a small business owner and entrepreneur in the health and wellness industry for more than 25 years has a master’s degree in Sustainable Systems from The Presidio Graduate School.

SBDC advising services are paid for by a matching-funds grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) that is administered by Washington State University. Each year the Washington SBDC must secure matching funds from state and local sources including community colleges and economic development agencies. The SBDC office in Mount Vernon is co-located with the Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County.