

Washington SBDC MOUNT VERNON CENTER 2019 ECONOMIC IMPACT



SBDC ADVISORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

	2019	2010-2019
Served by the SBDC CLIENTS	184	634
Start New BUSINESSES	14	52
Created & Saved JOBS	271	506
Generated SALES	\$7,441,943	\$9,556,765
Change in Sales EXPORT	\$26,980	\$236,980
Access Investment CAPITAL	\$6,719,325	\$14,789,150

Economic Impacts are self-reported and client-verified

STATEWIDE IMPACT

<p>Compared to average Washington businesses, Washington SBDC clients increased revenue & created jobs at significantly greater rates than other Washington businesses.</p>	+ JOB GROWTH +
	<p>5.4% Washington average 75% average SBDC client</p>
<p>↑ SALES GROWTH ↑</p>	<p>4.9% Washington average 14.1% average SBDC client</p>



For every **\$1** invested in the Washington SBDC, our clients generate **\$3.32** in incremental tax revenue.



96% of our clients say they would recommend SBDC services to others.

10-year average (2010-2019) of Independent Annual Survey by Dr. James Chrisman, Mississippi State University

SUCCESS STORY: Forté Chocolates, Mount Vernon, WA

For a dozen years, chocolatier Karen Neugebauer has been perfecting her craft while running her own small business, Forte Chocolates.

"Chocolate doesn't back down," she said from her production kitchen on Riverside Drive in Mount Vernon. That means chocolate is a fantastic medium for a self-described "control freak" who loves both science and art.

At her retail shop on First Street in downtown Mount Vernon, at her store in the Bellis Fair Mall in Bellingham, at her production kitchen and at fortechocolates.com, patrons can choose among handcrafted caramels, more than a dozen different chocolate bars, bark, macarons and an assortment of truffles. Along with the classics like dark chocolate, milk chocolate, Neugebauer also crafts cherry almond, lemon pepper and balsamic fig truffles.

"Each truffle is a one inch canvas that I need to make as beautiful on the outside as it is on the inside," Neugebauer said.

At the top of her game as an artisan—she's been named one of the 10 top chocolatiers in the world—she's begun to think about her legacy.

"I want to leave my company to the employees who helped me grow it," she said, "and that's really hard to do." The challenge, she said, is to build the company to a point of sustainability so that it can withstand the departure of one or two key people, most notably herself.

In order to do that, she said, she needs to quadruple her staff to about 80 employees and grow revenue to between \$5 million and \$10 million per year. "I'm done with being a small business," she said.

Her ally in this quest is Cindy Brooks, a business advisor with the Washington Small Business Development Center. Neugebauer first started meeting with Brooks in May 2019 after she and her admin manager began participating in the ScaleUp Business Training program presented by the Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County (EDASC) in partnership with the Washington Department of Commerce.

Neugebauer, who has degrees from the University of Washington in marketing, entrepreneurship and accounting, said the ScaleUp program was a refresher course in business management that built upon what she had learned at the UW Foster School of Business.

"It was great to talk with other business owners about issues that we all share, regardless of the industry or the size of the business," she said. "It

also gave my admin manager a good insight into how owners think and how we approach problems as a whole."

Working one-on-one with Brooks, she said, has enabled her to keep the momentum going. Not only has she added three people to her production kitchen in anticipation of future growth, but she has also started a Kickstarter campaign to finance equipment that will enable her to create craft chocolate in a beans-to-bar process, which was a long-term goal.

"Just because you know something should be done doesn't mean you do it," Neugebauer said. "Meeting with Cindy every week was a great way to hold us accountable for making progress," Neugebauer said. "She'd give us homework every week and we'd do it and then come back and ask, 'What's next?'"

Early in her career she thought she needed to focus on either quality OR quantity, Neugebauer said, but it's not a binary choice.

"We've figured out production scalability, developed consistent brand messaging across all platforms, and established a world-class reputation for impeccable quality," she said. "Now we are ready to grow."

Fortunately, the SBDC and EDASC are there to help.



Karen Neugebauer, owner

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The Washington SBDC network, hosted by Washington State University, is an accredited member of America's SBDC. Funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, institutions of higher education, economic development organizations and other public and private funding partners.



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