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DAILY HAMPSHIRE
GAZETTE



Grant of \$140,000 pegged for local small business help

BY MATT PILON STAFF WRITER

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[Originally published on: Tuesday, April 29, 2008]

EASTHAMPTON - Attention potential or existing small business owners. Help has arrived. Again.



The Valley Community Development Corporation microenterprise assistance program is back on its feet in the Eastworks Building, thanks to \$140,000 from a community development block grant awarded to Easthampton earlier this year.

Gene Talsky, the Valley CDC's Director of Small Business Development, said he is glad to be back in the third floor office Monday through Thursday. His hours had been cut drastically since grant funding dried up last year, and the nonprofit had to dip into its housing assistance funds just to keep a skeleton operation running while the city awaited word on grant money. All is well, at least for the next 15 months, Talsky said.

The money will allow the Valley CDC to provide technical assistance to income qualified Easthampton business owners and residents seeking to start up a business.

That assistance includes such services one-on-one counseling, business plan writing, development workshops, credit counseling, referrals to financial institutions, and assistance with loan applications.

Most businesses would not get very far without a business plan, Talsky said. And he has critiqued and written hundreds of them. "The one thing you can bet on is revenue comes in lower and slower and costs come in sooner and higher," Talsky said. "You've got to be realistic."

Upcoming classes and workshops this summer will be announced at www.valleycdc.com.

Anyone interested in business assistance services can call Talsky at 529-0420 or email him at grt@valleycdc.com.

The city has maintained a business assistance relationship with the Valley CDC since 1998. This is the fourth grant provided to the nonprofit since then.

City Grants Coordinator Ellen Koteen said that working with the agency for the past 10 years has been beneficial for local business and the city's economy.

"Many people have wonderful ideas and are very passionate and energetic, but they need specific assistance to make those a reality," she said.

Talsky said that he and other staffers are constantly on the lookout for other grant opportunities. Several months ago, the Valley CDC received a \$17,000 grant from the Western Massachusetts Electric Company and well as matching funds from several banks.

The additional money will allow Talsky to provide some services for non Easthampton residents and businesses.

A \$57,000 Hewlett-Packard grant awarded last summer allowed the agency to purchase computers and other equipment for seminars on spreadsheets and other programs useful for business projections.

Funding looks promising for now, but Talsky said that grant funding can make it difficult to maintain a continuous operation in the longterm.

"Sooner or later, the state and federal government need to understand that you can't do these programs year by year," he said. "You really have to fund them for several years at a time."

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