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**Valley CDC looks to Amherst, Hadley****BY MATT PILON STAFF WRITER**[EMAIL THIS WRITER](#) [MORE STORIES BY THIS WRITER](#)

NORTHAMPTON - A local nonprofit that offers free technical assistance to small businesses in Easthampton and Northampton will be expanding its reach, thanks to a state grant.

The Valley Community Development Corp. has received a \$75,000 economic stimulus grant from the Massachusetts Office of Business and Technology. The funding will allow the Valley CDC to expand the size and reach of its small business development program.

The corporation will now be able to provide free business assistance to clients in Amherst and Hadley.

"Those two communities have never funded any small business assistance programs," said Gene R. Talsky, the Valley CDC's director of small business development. "I think there's an opportunity to provide some services out there."

The cities of Northampton and Easthampton, under a state Ready Resource grant, pay the CDC to provide free small-business counseling.

Talsky said he is in touch with the Amherst Chamber of Commerce to discuss ways in which the CDC can effectively aid area businesses.

The funding boost will also allow CDC staff to provide technical assistance to companies with 20 or fewer employees. Under the Ready Resource grant, they were restricted to companies with a maximum of five employees.

Talsky said this will allow the CDC to help past clients whose ventures have grown beyond the reach of the assistance program, as well as new companies "all over the landscape."

"We feel that there's a large, untapped market here in Easthampton alone," he said. "There's many companies that are just off the radar."

Donald A. Boisvert, director of Business Networking International Western Massachusetts, said he believes business-assistance programs are crucial to the economy of western Massachusetts.

BNI, as its name suggests, is a business referral company with chapters worldwide. It has 22 chapters in the region and some 475 members.

Boisvert said a "fundamental problem" entrepreneurs face is not having an effective business plan or the technical knowledge necessary for proper record-keeping.

"Without those kinds of checks in place, a business is often not aware of where their customers are coming from - or, for that matter, how they got them," he said.

Boisvert said he works with a variety of businesses and has firsthand knowledge of the effectiveness of the CDC's business assistance program. He himself took one of their courses in Easthampton seven years ago after he was laid off as a human resources director.

"Participating in the CDC program that is being made available was a huge assistance for me in terms of being able to understand the bigger dynamics," he said. "It was hugely successful for me in terms of educating me about the number of things I really needed to pay attention to."

After taking the course, Boisvert became an independent human resources consultant. He said there was "no doubt in my mind" that the course he took propelled him to his new position.

Entrepreneurs from Hadley and Amherst may have to travel to the Valley CDC's offices in Northampton or Hadley for assistance, but Talsky said his staff may also commute to the two towns.

Interested parties from all four communities may contact Talsky at 529-0420.

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