

Orleans County Micro-enterprise class gives a slice of advice

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ALBION — The lessons of entrepreneurship — and the mistakes that come with it — can be explained with pizza.

There's the pizza shop that didn't know why it wasn't making money. Of course, it didn't know what it cost to make their pies.

Or the guy who thought he could beat out the competition in a college town with a better slice at a lower cost. He didn't have any restaurant experience, or even know how many pizza shops were within a drunken stumble.

"He just liked pizza," SBDC Advisor Richard Petite told the latest class of Orleans County Micro-Enterprise Assistance Program students Tuesday.

There aren't any perspective pizza chefs in the 10-week business plan development class, which launched last week at the Hoag Library in Albion.

In the mission and vision statements proclaimed Tuesday, they range from cloud storage and video production to the removal and recycling of roadkill.

Some already own their businesses, like The Plant Man — Michael Klepp of West Shelby — and others are weighing what it would take to start a new path.

Christine Heideman of Lyndonville is an insurance agent taking the classes to think through a plan for launching Tender Loving Cakes, a home-based bakery of gourmet cupcakes.

"I'm trying to make a dream come true," Heideman said.

Klepp has worked most of his adult life in landscaping for residential and commercial clients. His 11-year business in Medina is running well, but he's looking to move from being in the weeds to a greater management role.

"The business is physically taxing, I want to train people and new employees," he said.

Their goals and outlook are the first step in building out documents that can be used to guide their first years of business, pursue investment and manage unexpected issues.



Richard Petite

SBDC Advisor Richard Petite guided business owners and entrepreneurs through the first step in developing business plans during a Orleans County Micro-Enterprise Assistance Program class Tuesday. (Jim Krencik/Daily News)

Diane Blanchard of the Orleans EDA passed out the business plan of Paper Boys, a Medina office supply and business support store whose owners graduated from the program in 2011. It's a thick document of financial targets, market research and realistic goals.

"We take you through it, step by step, don't panic," Petite said as students looked it over. "It's not the bottom of Everest that you have to climb."

That's not to say students lack for sherpas, er, weekly speakers whose advice adds to the instruction of Petite and fellow advisor Sam Campenella give weekly in a college course-style presentation.

Tuesday's was Bindings Bookstore owner Carolyn Ricker, who leads the Albion Merchants Association. Ricker encouraged students to be active in business promotion events, from those that help the community to shopping tours, and groups like the merchants association.

"You do a lot better when you are in the know and people know about you," Ricker said.

It's early, but both Klepp and Heideman see they have partners in growing businesses. The Plant Man could benefit from the video production skills of a fellow student.

Heideman said her confidence in pursuing a different business comes from what the SBDC can do, beyond the support in terms of loans. It's the free advice that continues on long after the business plan is completed.

"To have somebody with you for five years out, the connections you make (is confidence-building)," Heideman said.