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Sharon Maitland at desk in Main Street Eatery in Creswell

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By Jurgen Boerema

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Archived Story

BCCC's Small Business Center helps Creswell business open and thrive

Published 4:43pm Wednesday, September 11, 2013

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-Press Release submitted by Betty Gray

Washington County business owners Sharon and Billy Maitland had a dream – they would open an upscale restaurant in an abandoned grocery store on Main Street in Creswell.

The restaurant would augment their funeral home in Creswell by giving families a convenient place to gather for a meal and it would spur other businesses to open and revitalize the Main Street area of the town.

"There were no restaurants in Creswell and I realized that a restaurant went hand-in-hand with our funeral home business," Sharon Maitland said. "And Main Street needed something desperately to help it revive."

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Reuters

When an appraisal on the grocery store came in lower than expected and funding for the project fell short, Sharon Maitland began searching for grants to provide the needed capital for the renovations.

"I had ideas about what I wanted to say in the grant application, but I needed somebody to help me put it on paper," she said.

That's when Lentz Stowe, director of Business and Industry Services at Beaufort County Community College, stepped in to help with expertise available to the Maitlands.

Stowe said it's just part of the services that the Small Business Center provides under the umbrella of BCCC's Business and Industry Services.

As part of a statewide network of centers, the Small Business Center at BCCC helps the over 1,600 small businesses in Beaufort, Hyde, Tyrell and Washington counties like Main Street Eatery survive, prosper, and contribute to the economic well-being of the area, according to Stowe

Small Business Centers provide a wide variety of seminars and workshops, one-on-one counseling, a library of resources, and referrals to other sources to prospective and current owners and operators of small businesses; plus, the services are at no cost to clients and attendees.

Using the Maitlands' business plan for the restaurant, Stowe worked with the couple in face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and email exchanges and helped coordinate participation by the Town of Creswell last summer to meet a four-week deadline for grant applications from the N.C. Rural Center.

With Stowe's help, the Maitlands met the deadline and secured a grant for \$40,000 which enabled the project to move ahead.

"Make no mistake – the Maitlands worked hard to be eligible for this funding," Stowe said. "As a result, they were uniquely qualified to take advantage of this grant opportunity."

The restaurant opened its doors in December, initially bringing 15 new jobs to the town and drawing local customers as well as customers from Edenton, Plymouth, Roper, Windsor, Hertford and as far away as the Outer Banks.

Although Sharon Maitland found that running a restaurant in a small town is not easy, she also enjoyed the work and was glad she and her husband made the investment.

"I love it," she said. "We're getting a lot of positive reviews. I loved the challenge of doing something that was unexpected in our small town."

But she also discovered that she had a lot to learn about fine tuning restaurant operations.

That's when Stowe and BCCC's Small Business Center stepped in again – this time to link the Maitlands with an expert in restaurant management who can help make their business profitable.

"Once you're a client, you're always a client," he said. "If an entrepreneur has an idea for a small business and seeks our help, we're with him or her for the long run."

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