

Networking Vital for N.D. Small Businesses

National Small Business Week, which begins May 16, is a time to reflect on the importance of small-business owners in a local economy.

“For small-business owners, it also represents a time to look around and understand that you are not in this struggle alone,” says Glenn Muske, rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist for the North Dakota State University Extension Service. “So often, the business owner indicates that he or she seems to be the only one facing certain problems.”

The reality, though, is far from the perception. North Dakota has a little more than 17,000 small-business owners. This means you have colleagues just like you across the state who are facing, have faced or soon will be facing the same issues.

So how do you find these people?

“The first place to start is to network in your own local community,” says (insert local name, title and county office). “That means joining the Chamber of Commerce but also getting involved in other organizations and/or community efforts where other small-business owners are gathering.”

Another opportunity to find your colleagues is to contact local sources of information, such as your county NDSU Extension Service office. The professional staff in the office can help you identify other small-business owners in the community and around the state. They also can provide small-business resource information.

Other local sources of information include banks, certified public accountants and insurance agents. And don't forget your local library.

“Of course, you probably already have a network of business owners,” Muske says. “Be sure to ask them for other leads.”

In addition, check with the Small Business Center that supports your area.

An online search also can be helpful.

“Today, the chances are good that you will find other business owners just like you who are chatting and blogging online,” (insert last name). “Do some searching for these groups, then listen to see if the group you have found fits your need. If it does, great. Get involved, not only by listening, but offering your ideas and suggestions. If the group is not meeting your needs, move on to other groups. Once you find a helpful group, ask or watch and see what other groups it might suggest.”

However, be a cautious consumer of information, Muske advises. Don't assume all the information you get will be accurate. Also don't buy a service that claims it will solve all your problems without doing your homework.

The NDSU Extension Service has resources to help business owners understand their business priorities. More small-business information is online at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness/. Visit the site to register for our regular small-business newsletter.

eXtension, an educational partnership of 74 universities, including NDSU, is another resource. It provides objective and research-based information and learning opportunities to help people improve their lives. Visit www.extension.org/entrepreneurship.