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Salt Lake Community College Powers Up Business Start-Ups

By Michael O'Malley, Marketing and Communications, USTAR

The largest publicly-funded business incubator in Utah is located at Salt Lake Community College's Miller Business Resource Center. Co-located with the Salt Lake Region Small Business Development Center (SL SBDC), the Miller Business Innovation Center (MBIC) opened its doors in 2003. Considered a "mixed use" incubator serving clients in a range of markets, the Center has attracted publishing, franchiser, software development and medical device entrepreneurs. Currently it serves 14 resident clients and has "graduated" 20 companies.

"We follow the entrepreneurial philosophy of Larry H. Miller, Miller Campus' largest benefactor. We look for start-ups that are relevant to their markets, with products or services that have high potential for growth," SBDC consultant Jeff Chance says. For a company or entrepreneur to become a client requires successfully passing a screening process. The Center fields a selection committee comprised of a consulting business person (usually a successful entrepreneur), a senior staff member of the Miller Business Resource Center, and two SBDC business development directors, themselves experienced business people.



Once the committee selects a client, the Center – which has 15,000 square feet of office, meeting, cubicle and work space - offers a range of services, including basic business amenities such as internet access.

“For a client to lease space is very cost-effective, but there’s also no cost to clients for SBDC counselors to advise on business plans, market analysis, distribution strategies, or other aspects of building a business,” Chance says.

“We also have relationships with various early-stage investors and help our clients network with possible funding sources.”

The Center’s staff is experienced and well connected. Director Rex Falkenrath is a long-time entrepreneur and consultant with a three-decade record in the high technology and consumer auto parts markets. He has lectured on lean distribution practice at BYU’s Marriott School of Business, Westminster’s Gore College of Business and served on the Dean’s Round Table on Ethics at the University of Utah’s David Eccles School of Business.

Chance spent time with Delphi Corporation and has consulted for startup companies in life sciences, manufacturing, software, and other industries. He has also founded a retail home furnishings store. Consultant Mark Smolenski has more than 25 years of experience in both large and small companies. He has served as president, senior executive, and corporate director for a number of medical device companies.

According to center client, Olive Medical CEO Josh Talbert, running a business at the MBIC is very productive.

“It’s a great atmosphere with a lot of resources right on hand. If we have a question, we can just walk down the hall for an answer.”

“The price is right,” Talbert continues, “and being a client here has helped us meet new board members and potential investors.”

With guidance from the Salt Lake SBDC, Olive Medical has been able to secure seed capital, Talbert says.

Wayne Viehweg originally started his association with the Salt Lake SBDC as a mentor six years ago. Now he has moved his latest start-up, Simpure Power, into the center. Simpure Power helps companies ensure that the power within their facilities is clean and efficient, which in turn lowers utility costs and lengthens equipment life. The company has 12 customers, 20 installations, and has a growing backlog of orders. In a year and half, Simpure staff has grown from three to 12 employees.

“There’s a professional environment at the center that’s helping us create a culture and build a team,” Viehweg says.

“It’s a good place to bring customers, investors, and potential employees.”

Viehweg echoes Talbert on the topic of a collaborative atmosphere. “There’s a plethora of services here; we don’t have to beg, borrow or steal. It’s a networking environment to ask questions and solve problems.”

On a regular basis, the center offers an array of courses focused on the needs of small businesses. They range from free one-day seminars to 11-week classes in the range of \$500. Scholarships are available, Salt Lake SBDC Assistant Director Lowell Baggaley says.

In addition, the SL SBDC continues to adapt and is about to launch a virtual incubator service. “The web has changed the way people work and the way they launch companies,” Baggaley says. “Some start-ups can make great progress using online resources but aren’t at the stage where they need office space. They do, however, need a business address and a place to meet potential customers and investors. We’re launching this new service in response to the dynamics of our marketplace.”

The center works with other economic development partners to assist its clients. These partners include the U.S. Department of Commerce Export Assistance Center, the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC), Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), the USTAR Technology Outreach and Innovation Program, and others.

For more information on the SL SBDC Miller Business Innovation Center, visit <http://mbreslcc.com/mbic>. You can reach the Miller Business Innovation Center office by contacting Jackie Jolly at 801.957.5284 or jackie.jolly@slcc.edu.

About USTAR:

The Utah Science Technology and Research initiative (USTAR) is a long-term, state-funded investment to strengthen Utah’s “knowledge economy” and generate high-paying jobs. Funded in March 2006 by the State Legislature, USTAR is based on three program areas. The first area involves funding for strategic investments at the University of Utah and Utah State University to recruit world-class researchers. The second area is to build state-of-the-art interdisciplinary facilities at these institutions for the innovation teams. The third program area involves teams that work with companies and entrepreneurs across the State to promote science, innovation, and commercialization activities. For more information, go to www.innovationutah.com or follow <http://twitter.com/Innovationutah>.