

K-9 Detectives: Growth through Passion and Guidance



Animal lover Christine Barsema originally began training show competition dogs as a hobby. Now, she is the successful owner of **K-9 Detectives, LLC**, a Clearwater, Florida business that offers certified canine detection of bedbugs, mold, drugs and termites. K-9 Detectives has grown from Barsema's passion for her work and that of her dogs, but also from the knowledge and resources available through the **Florida Small Business Development Center ((FSBDC) at Pinellas County Economic Development (PCED)**.

"Almost nothing great has ever been achieved without passion," asserts Yolanda Cowart, Certified Business Consultant at the FSBDC at PCED. "Our most innovative entrepreneurs and business leaders – people like Christine – have it. But passion alone won't fuel success. Entrepreneurs need skills, contacts and resources to turn that passion into profit."

A large part of growing a small business is finding, and oftentimes making, opportunities. Enter the Woman Owned Business Enterprise (WBE) Focus Group created by the FSBDC's Pinellas County center to assist woman-owned businesses interested in working with government agencies. Meeting with the WBE Focus Group exposes participants to a variety of FSBDC programs that advance job creation, support business growth and enhance innovation, and provides opportunities to brainstorm with other business owners about new ways to expand their services.

"One of the things that the women have been working on in the Focus Group is how to identify the right government agencies for their services and then how to highlight and promote the unique qualities that make their businesses stand out in the competitive market," explains Cowart.

For Barsema, the opportunity to expand her services came through her dogs' skills as therapy dogs.

"The dogs love their work and interacting with people," she says. "They truly sense when somebody is in pain."

Several years ago, Caleb, Barsema's six-year-old Bouvier des Flandres, began providing therapy services on a volunteer basis. Barsema's charitable work has led to new opportunities, including the creation of a therapy dog program launched by a local law enforcement agency.

"The exposure Christine gained through volunteering provided her with insight into government and other non-profit groups' needs, as well as how best to position her business's value when it comes time to compete for a contract," explains Dr. Cynthia Johnson, Center Director of the FSBDC at PCED. "Ultimately, following her passion, doing something really great for others in need, also benefits Christine's business."

"It's very encouraging to others in the WBE Focus Group to see how well K-9 Detectives is doing," says Cowart. "And that's the point of the group: to lend support, exchange ideas, and learn from one another's experiences."

"Doing what we love is absolutely a win-win for everyone involved," Barsema concludes. "I'm happy, my dogs are happy, our clients are happy, and my business is growing. If that isn't success, I don't know what is!"

Learn more about K-9 Detectives at www.k9detectives.com.

Discover tools and opportunities to expand your business at www.pced.org/sbdc.

