



Photo attached: Nancy Williamson, business consultant for the Newberry Area SBDC, is honored with the State Star Award.

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Contact:

Janna McMahan
Marketing Manager
SC SBDC
803-777-0440
jmcmahan@sc.edu



Nancy Williamson named SC SBDC State Star, Helps nearly 1,000 businesses

Columbia, SC—Nancy Williamson, CBA, was recently selected the South Carolina Small Business Development Center (SC SBDC) network’s State Star, a distinction imparted by her peers. This honor is based on exemplary performance as a business consultant in specific key performance indicators, her enthusiasm for representing the network in the business community, her contributions to local economic development and her longstanding contributions to the SC SBDC.

Williamson has been running the Newberry Area SBDC located at Newberry College for more than five years. She works primarily with Newberry County clients, but also helps her fellow consultants across the state when they need assistance with web design and social media for their clients. Williamson sees around 60 clients individually and hundreds in her workshops each year.

Williamson offers all types of consulting expertise for both existing businesses and startups. The emphasis of the consulting she provides is in the areas of search engine optimization (SEO), online marketing and social media.

“Many of my clients are on a tight budget and can’t afford extensive marketing, so I help them through the use of free advertising and marketing resources,” Williamson said. “Most of my clients are very uncomfortable with using social media at first, and some downright refuse, but then they come around once they learn how they can build brand awareness and promote their business at no cost. During our first meeting, I look at their website and give them ideas on how to improve functionality and show them simple steps to increase their online presence.”

Williamson says clients are often intimidated with the technology side of business and she finds that giving them a clear plan, or homework steps, can help them feel more comfortable with the process. She has created her own SEO worksheet that guides clients without overwhelming them. She says all clients, from professionals like lawyers, doctors and physical therapists to those who own restaurants and retail stores can benefit from an online presence and that every business needs a website to be competitive in today’s market.

Williamson states that the first counseling session with a new client usually lasts two hours, sometimes longer if things are moving to where they can work on specific items. About half of her client base has existing websites. She finds the clients without one are under the impression that a website will cost thousands of dollars. Williamson presents a website workshop several times a year that teaches business owners how to create, edit and maintain their own online presence. They leave her workshop with a basic, functional website and in subsequent counseling sessions they can return to her for free one-on-one training to help further their skills.

Williamson also helps clients with other facets of their business, including planning and getting started.

“Sometimes my clients have a wonderful vision of their business in their head, but once we translate all those thoughts into a business plan and financial projections we realize that their idea may not work,” Williamson said. “I remind them that those days, weeks or months

that we put into their business plan weren't wasted; it is much better to fail on paper than in real life. I try never to discourage a dream, but sometimes seeing the projected bottom line helps clients realize that their dream just isn't a feasible reality and it is always better for them to see and understand that themselves."

Williamson will receive her award at the national conference of Small Business Development Centers in San Francisco in September. After working with nearly a thousand clients in South Carolina, Williamson says she is still learning about business with every new client.

"Even if I have two clients with the same type of business in the same industry, the businesses are never the same," Williamson said. "Each business owner's personality and vision is so different that my job is never boring. I love getting to know my clients and helping them achieve their goals. When I drive by one of the small businesses that I have assisted, I can't help but smile and take pride in the work that we do at the SBDC."

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