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FEATURED

Inaugural class graduates from Corry small business program

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A group of 11 entrepreneurs and local business owners recently graduated from the first-ever Corry Small Business Jump Start program. In front, from left, are Betsy Grinder, Anita Baker, Jennifer Utegg, Sherry Brown, Jonathan Dietz and Corry Hi-Ed Executive Director Brody Howard. In back are Josh Dyne, Scott Johnson, Brad Allen, Chelsea Oliver, Lydia Spencer, program instructor Gary Svetz and Donnie Rosie.

Jordan Schrecengost/The Corry Journal

Eleven local business owners and entrepreneurs are ready to tackle the challenges of creating and maintaining companies and business ventures after recently graduating from a new program at the Corry Higher Education Council.



Corry Small Business Jump Start program instructor Gary Svetz, left, shakes hands with Sherry Brown as she's presented with a plaque.

Corry Hi-Ed's freshly minted program was led by instructor Gary Svetz, president of Svetz Consulting Services LLC in Meadville.

The small business jump start program may be new to Corry, but Svetz has helped develop and offer the program since 2004, benefiting about 675 businesses in Venango and Crawford counties. He said it was a fun pilot program with a great group of people.

"Brody and his staff have been excellent to work with," Svetz said. "I kept putting the ball back in his court saying, it's got to be a Corry flavor. It can't just be something I bring in. It's something that has to be modified and work for your community."

The program was supposed to start on March 18 but was delayed since the Hi-Ed building was forced to shut down on March 17 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Once the building could reopen, the Corry Small Business Jump Start program lasted for nine weeks with participants meeting on Wednesdays at the Hi-Ed from 6 to 8:30 p.m. A curriculum outline contained multiple subjects in each session geared toward helping develop small businesses.

"I really have a passion for small business and right now small business needs everything to survive," Svetz said,

There were 11 members of the inaugural class: Brad Allen, Anita Baker, Sherry Brown, Jonathan Dietz, Josh Dyne, Betsy Grinder, Scott Johnson, Chelsea Oliver, Donnie Rosie, Lydia Spencer and Jennifer Utegg.

"It takes a community to build businesses," Svetz said. "I've been lucky that you were a really good group to start this program with."

The graduates were presented with custom plaques for completing the program during Wednesday's ceremony.

"I really hope that you got a lot from the program and hopefully we'll be able to be an overall advocate for future programs," Howard said.

Howard went on to thank the various sponsors who helped make the program possible.

"A lot went into this. We've had several contributions, whether it be monetarily or just items, materials or resources, that really help bring this program altogether and keep it very low cost," he said.

The graduates were given the opportunity to talk about the program and what they learned when they were presented with their plaque.

"I think one of the things I took away that really helped me the most was the marketing section, but the whole thing was very good, informative and helpful," Utegg said.

Brown said she learned a lot from the class.

"When I came here, I didn't know the first thing really about running a business I was doing it but I was feeling like I was flying by the seat of my pants, and now I feel like I have a better, clearer plan," she said.

Dietz said he gained some direction through the Corry Small Business Jump Start program.

"It taught me how to navigate the business world a little bit," he said. "Hopefully I can keep learning as I go, but this was definitely a great foundation and I definitely recommend it to anybody and everybody."

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The inaugural class of the Corry Small Business Jump Start program was recognized during a graduation ceremony in the Bracken Room at the Hi-Ed building, 221 N. Center St., Corry, on Wednesday evening.

The program was for new and experienced entrepreneurs in the Corry area. It offered training in business plan startup, record keeping, financial statements, marketing, business loans, time/goal management, sales skills and more.

"Your overall commitment to your individual and respective businesses shows a lot," Brody Howard, Corry Hi-Ed executive director, said. "This program lends itself to meet you where you're at as a business owner, whether you're just starting off or have been at it awhile."