

## **Organizations partner to help women succeed as entrepreneurs South Carolina Women's Business Center opens office at YWCA in Greenville**

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Greenville and the Upstate is a region full of innovative entrepreneurial ideas, and two women's organizations have partnered to ensure that women have the resources they need to start and operate successful businesses.

The South Carolina Women's Business Center has opened an office in Greenville at the YWCA of Greenville's yW Empowerment Center on Augusta Street.

A reception honoring the new office and several local entrepreneurs was held Tuesday.

"Entrepreneurship is the engine that drives the economy," said Bernell King, a business consultant who will counsel Women's Business Center clients from Greenville, Anderson, Cherokee, Laurens, Oconee, Pickens and Spartanburg counties. "Even the big companies started this way."

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When the Upstate economy transitioned from the dominance of the textile industry, many workers felt they were left out because of their education, their skills or their age, King, a personal and business coach as well as an author, said.

"They see entrepreneurship as a viable opportunity," she said. "We are here to help entrepreneurs to establish and grow businesses."

If women increase their income by 10 percent, it would add more than \$1 billion to the state's economy, said Haidee Stith, executive director of the South Carolina Community Enterprise Center and Women's Business Center.

One example of a Women's Business Center client is Leona Crouch, the co-owner of No Name Skate Park on Roper Mountain Road in Greenville County.

"Skateboarders have this stigmas added to them," Crouch said, although her 15-year-old son, who is a skateboarder, does not fit that image.

So she and her husband decided there was a need for a place for kids to skateboard in safety.

"We have a lot of customers," she said of the first year of operation.

No Name Skate Park, a for-profit enterprise, has had 8,200 first-time visitors, she said.

"We do give lessons," she said, and hold a summer camp. She plans to offer an after-school program next year.

The Women's Business Center has been open in Greenville for about 45 days and currently is hearing from two to three clients every day from throughout the Upstate, King said.

The organization primarily works with women, but it also accepts men as clients.

Currently, the Greenville office has 26 clients.

In the six weeks of existence, six new businesses have started, she said.

Also, 17 clients are actively developing a business plan.

"Entrepreneurship is not just starting a business. It's being successful," Stith said.

And the center "is a place for any entrepreneur to come and gain the confidence and skills they need," she said.

While the Upstate already has strong entrepreneurial programs, the Women's Business Center is transformational program, which addresses business issues throughout the life of a business.

Garnette Bane, a member of the WBC advisory board and an entrepreneur, said the new office is a "great Christmas gift to the Upstate.

To the many who are afraid to launch a product, I say, 'Go for it.'"

Bane is marketing a post-surgical healthcare product, made in Clemson and using Milliken and Co. fabric.

Although Greenville tends to be an entrepreneurial center, other parts of the Upstate and women throughout the region often need the resources and help they can find at the Women's Business Center, Stith said.

The Women's Business Center also has offices in Columbia and Charleston and has part-time offices in other locations.