The Edge: Florida Tech organization for women has banner year
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(Photo: For FLORIDA TODAY)

The Women's Business Center (WBC) at Florida Institute of Technology is here to serve the business community and it has been an incredible year for small business growth in Brevard County.

We've seen an increase of 18 percent in client activity this year, having served 56 local businesses and executives through workshops and tailored mentoring programs. We would like to thank all of our sponsors, mentors and volunteers for helping us to meet client needs throughout the year. During the past 12 months, we've worked with clients who have experienced increased revenues exceeding 20 percent and grown to hire more than 40 new employees! Additionally, 17 new business ventures were launched with the help of WBC programs.

Posner and Kouzes, founders of the Leadership Challenge and a Wiley Brand, wrote that "the best way to lead people into the future is to connect with them deeply in the present," and the WBC makes this connection through its IGNITE 360 mentoring program every day. For six months at a time, we share each client's vision. We listen. We bring in experts to address individual challenge areas that our clients face. And, we work with mentees to help grow their businesses by creating short-term plans to guide them toward their goals. The IGNITE 360 mentoring program has been so effective, that we have seen an increase in requests for graduates to participate in the program again.

The Women's Business Center has another vision, that of accelerating sustainable business growth for female entrepreneurs that contributes to a positive economic impact on our community. For 2015, we have identified five specific actions that will help shape an even more successful business climate for entrepreneurs moving forward.

No 1: In 2015, we will expand WBC services into Central Florida with a new office in the greater Orlando area. We will also begin operations at our new satellite office in Rockledge. We will also be increasing our outreach activities into Indian River and St. Lucie counties to offer consultation services and business education workshops there.

No. 2: We will expand our IGNITE 360 mentoring program to serve 25 companies through our Advantage and Premier programs (for advanced and second-stage businesses) in Melbourne and Rockledge. And, we will offer the IGNITE Pathways program for those in the concept to start-up phase of their business in February, May and September.

No. 3: We will provide access to capital resources for clients. The WBC understands that it takes money to grow a business. Thus, we will roll out a finance-based mentoring program and work with local lenders to pilot a micro lending program for business owners looking for capital. To support these initiatives, we will host a Financial Fluency Awareness Fair on April 21 and an Access to Capital Resource Seminar on May 12.

No. 4: We will engage aspiring youth from ages 9-13 and 14-18 to look at their talents and attributes as a resource that could one day lead to their economic independence. We will offer two distinct week-long youth entrepreneurial summer camp programs in June 2015 that provide interactive learning opportunities and insights as to what it takes to be an entrepreneur.
No. 5: Finally, we will provide interactive, online and face-to-face business education training in English and Spanish aimed to reinforce effective business development and business management skills.

By implementing the above action plan for 2015, the Women's Business Center will be in a better position to support our community's shared vision for accelerated, sustainable business growth. We are YOUR Women's Business Center and we are proud to serve you.

Connect with us today, and we can take that next step toward achieving your vision, together.

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_Columnist series sponsored by the Women's Business Center at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. For more information, visit http://wbc.fit.edu/_