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The Missouri Southern State University Small Business & Technology Development Center (MSSU SBTDC) entered into a new service era following the devastating May 22, 2011 tornado that hit Joplin, MO. The quality of service and perceived value to the community placed the SBTDC at the forefront to serve in the wake of the disaster.

### **Background Information**

The MSSU SBTDC opened on April 1, 1987. The Center was staffed by Jim Krudwig, Director, and Karen Bradshaw, Director of the Center for Entrepreneurship. Various staff filled other positions until April 1, 1993 when Lisa Robinson was hired as Consultant. The SBTDC has been in place for over 24 years serving the Joplin community and local area.

Jim Krudwig, Director, announced his retirement on December 1, 2010. The retirement date was scheduled for June 1, 2011. On Friday, May 20, the staff of the SBTDC held a retirement party to celebrate Jim's years of service and dedication to the SBTDC program and MSSU. That same day, the selection committee offered the Director position to Lisa Robinson.

When Monday, May 23 arrived, the SBTDC staff of four was temporarily a staff of two, Lisa Robinson and Karen Bradshaw. Jim Krudwig had suffered the loss of a family member (his son-in-law), and Sarah (Johnson) Vargyas (our staff Research Associate) had lost her home.

On August 11, 2011, Ken Surbrugg was hired as a Consultant at the MSSU SBTDC.

### **Recovery Efforts**

By Tuesday, May 24 a plan was in place for the SBA to open a Business Recovery Center (BRC) in the Joseph Newman Innovation Center adjacent to the Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce in downtown Joplin. The SBTDC was asked to join in the effort and provide business counseling to those coming to the BRC. Lisa and Karen gladly accepted the invitation to assist in the recovery.

The MSSU SBTDC was able to obtain a Disaster Resource Guide for Small Businesses from the Alabama SBDC network (they had suffered a devastating tornado in April). The MO SBTDC state office used the Alabama guide to create one specific to Missouri.

This was the first disaster of great magnitude to occur in Missouri and the first time the MO SBTDC system was faced with quickly responding to the dire situation in Joplin.

On Thursday, May 26, the MSSU SBTDC opened the doors of the Business Recovery Center alongside the SBA Disaster Recovery Team. The SBA team lead was Vicky Norton, who is a retired SBA Project Officer. Norton understood the SBTDC program and capabilities and was very responsive to everyone's questions. Norton worked with the SBTDC staff to determine the best flow of service for those visiting the BRC. The SBA team was willing to try new room configurations and traffic flow so the BRC could effectively and efficiently provide service without delays. Several SBA public information officers, as well as SBA national and regional personnel, were instrumental in helping to support and publicize the services offered at the BRC.

Each affected business person who visited the BRC was provided a folder of information that contained the Disaster Resource Guide, an IRS Publication #2194-B, "Disaster Losses Kit for Businesses," and a brochure about the MO SBTDC program. Each person was told about the services of the SBTDC program and encouraged to contact the MSSU SBTDC for assistance.

The BRC hours were 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Tuesday hours were 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Saturday hours were 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Saturday traffic slowed by the end of June and the day was no longer included in the schedule. In July, the schedule changed to 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. SBA staff finished their duty at the BRC on Friday, August 26.

### **Host Support**

The administrators and staff at Missouri Southern State University were vital to the success of the BRC. The MSSU SBTDC received tremendous support from the School of Business Administration Dean, Dr. Beverly Block. Dr. Block loaned her office staff to make sure the MSSU campus SBTDC office and the BRC office were both operational during the initial phases of the disaster. Campus support offices assisted with ordering supplies and equipment during the Memorial Day holiday weekend. They were vital to the success of operating the MSSU SBTDC at two locations.

### **Recovery Assistance**

The Pittsburg State University SBDC from Pittsburg, Kansas was one of the first to offer assistance in staffing the BRC. Kathryn Richard and her staff, Cindy Triplett and Tom Byler, spent a good portion of June and July in the BRC. The MSSU SBTDC was also very fortunate to have Wally Kearns assist in efforts to meet the needs of Joplin businesses affected by the tornado. Kearns retired as Kansas SBDC State Director in February 2011. He was and is a valued resource for Joplin's business recovery assistance. His knowledge and administration of disaster assistance was invaluable.

The MSSU SBTDC was also assisted by many members of the Missouri statewide SBTDC Staff: Darrell Brammer, Larry Lee, Danny Lobina, Kim Erwin, Lynette Watson, Virgil Woolridge, Rayanna Anderson, Tara Horton, Jim Gann, Isabel Isenhower, Kelly Dyer, Mick Gilliam, Chrystal Irons, Kathy Macomber, Jackie Rasmussen, and Chris Shoemaker. These individuals traveled from their offices located in Kansas City, St. Louis, Springfield, Columbia, and other areas in Missouri.

University of Missouri Extension played a huge role in contacting (by telephone) the businesses who had come to the BRC. They conducted a short survey to assess unmet needs and to reinforce the assistance available from the SBTDC network.

The BRIDG group at the MO SBTDC State Office provided a data analysis of the tornado path from ESRI software. The information has proved valuable to show those unfamiliar with Joplin the path of the storm and the effect on the various demographic groups.

Many local business professionals from Joplin area banks and other organizations worked to help staff the BRC.

### **Missouri Department of Economic Development Memorandum of Understanding with SBA**

The Missouri Department of Economic Development (MO DED) recognized that there would be instances to assist businesses who may be declined a loan from SBA. They were instrumental in getting Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreements signed with the SBA and the MO SBTDC State Office. The Small Business Disaster Relief Grow Missouri Loan program is administered jointly by the Missouri Development Finance Board (MDFB) and the Department of Economic Development (DED). The culmination of the project is that a pool of around \$500,000 is being loaned to various companies in Joplin. The MSSU SBTDC was the face for the program. Consultants worked with weekly decline lists from the SBA to educate the business owners on the opportunity from MO DED. The maximum loan from the program was \$50,000.

### **SBA Supplemental Funds**

From the first day after the disaster, the MO SBTDC State Office contacted the MSSU Center and was concerned how they could help and support the recovery efforts offered to Joplin area businesses. Max Summers, MO SBTDC State Director and Interim Statewide Program Director for University of Missouri Extension, contacted the SBA in Washington, D.C. to inquire about additional funds from the SBA that could be used to provide services to the devastated community.

Word was received in August from the SBA that supplemental funding had been granted for the disaster relief counseling to area small businesses. The funding is additional SBDC grant funds that are matched with Joplin Area of Commerce

expenditures to provide services as we work together to rebuild the community where we live, work, and serve.

## **Chamber Partnership**

For numerous years, the MSSU SBTDC has worked closely with the Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce (JACC) in planning educational events and seminars for the local business community. The relationship that has been built is one of trust, integrity, and a true partnership. The MSSU SBTDC has worked with the JACC to bring the best opportunities to the Joplin area. From this relationship, the JACC and the MSSU SBTDC were able to easily transition from separate entities into a partnership which was dubbed, "BIG Hub."

BIG Hub stands for "Business Initiatives and Growth Hub." It is the culmination of the MSSU SBTDC and JACC joining forces to open a satellite SBTDC in the Joseph Newman Innovation Center. The ribbon was cut on October 19, 2011 to officially open the Center. A new SBTDC Consultant, Shawn Wininger, is now in place and a Research Associate will soon be hired for the office.

Included is an additional document of Rob O'Brian's U.S. Senate testimony. O'Brian is President of the JACC. His testimony gives detail to the devastation and also importantly shows the value of the SBTDC program.

The SBTDC Director serves on the advisory board, Joplin Business Recovery and Expansion Initiative (JBREI). This is the first time that the MSSU SBTDC program has been recognized for the role it serves in Joplin regional economic development.

## **The Road Ahead**

One lesson learned from this disaster; Joplin is a community that bonded together. With agendas and egos aside, the community came together to work toward a common goal of recovery. JACC and MSSU SBTDC staff members have been looking forward to the road ahead and to a bright future of a new Joplin. Together these organizations have been working to rethink and rework the method of service delivery to local area small businesses.

*We welcome the opportunity to work together in the economic development community to supply the education and assistance needs to grow "Joplin Bigger Better Stronger."*  
*Respectfully submitted,*

*Lisa Robinson, Director*

*Karen Bradshaw, Director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Consultant*

*Ken Surbrugg, Consultant*

*Shawn Wininger, Consultant*

*Sarah Vargyas, Research Associate*