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Dr. Elizabeth A. Brown, D.C.

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NETWORKING AND EXPANSION: Tena Hudson, an owner of Coastal Wood Products near Belhaven, shows Small Business Director Lentz Stowe where the company's outdoor furniture has been sold through the company's website, www.coastalwoodproductsinc.com.

Small business center helps local businesses expand

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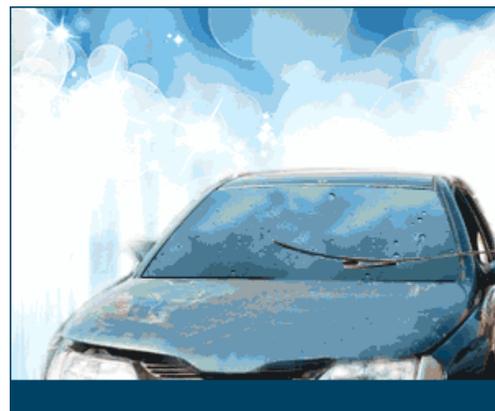


By Jonathan Rowe

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A map of the United States and Canada hangs on the wall of Coastal Wood Products owner Tena Hudson's office. She points with pride to the many pins all along the northeastern coast and as far away as southern California, showing the locations of the company's customer base.

Because of Internet-based sales developed from workshops and advice offered by the Small Business Center at Beaufort County Community College, Hudson's sales area has expanded, she said. Coastal Wood Products, established in 1992 by Hudson's parents, Lin and Carol Keech, specializes in outdoor furniture in cypress and oak. Hudson is a BCCC accounting graduate who worked about 30 years as an accountant while working part-time in the family business during busy times of the year, she said. However, after her mother died, Hudson and her brother, Terry, joined the business full-time to help her father.



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Reuters

"When I joined the business, I said I needed to bring something to the table to offer my dad," Hudson said. "We needed to expand so that I could be of worth to the company. We also wanted to develop products that we could easily sell online at our website."

Hudson, from her time as a student at the college, already knew about the Division of Continuing Education and the Small Business Center so, in 2010, she contacted its director, Lentz Stowe, for help in expanding the business.



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TWO GENERATIONS OF BUSINESS OWNERS: Pictured, Tena Hudson and her father, Lin Keech, showcase some of the products available at their business, Coastal Wood Products.

As part of a statewide network of centers, the Center at BCCC helps over 1,700 businesses in Beaufort, Hyde, Tyrrell and Washington counties prosper and contribute to the economic well being of the area, according to Stowe. The Center provides seminars and workshops, one-on-one counseling, a library of resources and referrals to other sources to prospective and current owners and operators of small businesses at no cost to clients and attendees. Since 1984, most economic development in the local area has come from entrepreneurs like Hudson, who open or expand a small business, Stowe said.

"It's all about economic impact," Stowe said. "And small businesses, especially those in the more rural area of the state are crucial to economic development."

Stowe said helping businesses keep employees like those at Coastal Woods Products is an important part of economic development in rural areas like eastern North Carolina. He estimates more than 150 jobs in the college's service area have been retained or created as a result of the Center's activities since 2009.

"Anybody who is going into business needs somewhere to go to find good information," Hudson said. "And the Small Business Center gave me that information."

Stowe directed Hudson to a workshop on government contracting — a possible source of expanded opportunities — offered through East Carolina University's SBTDC and provided key demographic information to help her business grow. Hudson also attended a Social Media Marketing class offered by the Small Business Center that taught her how to use Facebook and other Internet-based sites to sell her furniture. The new sales outlets have helped Hudson keep her employees, which number between seven and nine, depending on the season, busy year-round instead of working fewer hours in the winter.

"This has helped me out because I always have something for them to do," Hudson said. "There is always work on the production line."



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The Center has the potential to give its clients a boost through programs and workshops it offers, which is the point of Stowe's work, he said.

For more information about other services offered by BCCC's Small Business Center, including targeted seminars for business owners, visit BCCC's website at www.beaufortccc.edu/coned/contin.htm or contact Stowe by telephone at 252-940-6306 or by email at lentz.stowe@beaufortccc.edu. Visit Coastal Wood Products online at www.coastalwoodproductsinc.com.

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