

Help for new and existing Sarnia-Lambton business owners

by Nadine Wark



Jerry Beernink

During these times of economic downturn and job losses covering a wide sector of the working population, people are considering other options. Becoming self-employed and opening their own business is becoming a reality for some and the Sarnia-Lambton Business Development Corp. (SLBDC) offers help to not only the new entrepreneur but also existing businesses that might need a helping hand to get through the rough times.

The SLBCD is a non-profit community-based corporation funded by the Federal Government through Industry Canada's Community Futures Program and has been operating in Sarnia since 1988. The business is governed by a volunteer Board of highly skilled profession-

als from the local community and staffed by personnel who are dedicated to helping small businesses in Sarnia-Lambton to be more successful, thereby creating permanent jobs, growth and prosperity.

In the past 3 years, thousands of Lambton County residents used the free business counseling services with topics such as writing a business plan, problem solving, financial management and income tax issues, cost control, service, quality, inventory control, marketing and sales. People who cannot afford the services of a professional counselor are able to get help and advice from the SLBDC at no cost to them.

Two main forms of business assistance are provided... 1) free counseling in all areas of business manage-

ment and 2) repayable financing to a maximum of \$150,000 as Working Capital for an existing business (bridge financing, renovations, expenses) and up to \$250,000 as Capital Investment for new or existing business (funds for purchase of new property, new building, equipment, etc.). Banks have strict regulations for business loans and many borrowers have exhausted what traditional banks can loan them. The SLBDC offers financing, depending on credit worthiness and security with repayment terms and rates negotiated in the best interests of the business, with partial or full repayment made at any time without penalty.

Jerry Beernink has been employed by SLBDC since Jan. 2008. Born and raised in Lambton County, he has a background of 30 years operating a farm equipment dealership and is very knowledgeable and experienced in the areas of self-employment and small business. Jerry is a Counselor with the Ontario Self Employment Benefit (OSEB) which is a entrepreneurial program funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The SLBDC is the Delivery Agent for this program. Jerry explains, "The OSEB program provides eligible unemployed individuals with income and entrepreneurial support while they develop and implement their business plan. Owning a business is not for everyone and I take them through a process that helps them make the right decision. Some do not realize the intestinal fortitude and commitment it takes to be self-employed,

however if they are willing to do the hard work, it will hopefully pay off. I remind them that they might have to sweep floors or clean toilets, if necessary. That is sometimes the reality of being a business owner."

The OSEB program offers networking, personalized consultation, skills development, business/community resources, as well as personal income support (living expenses), if required, through a one year benefit program with Employment Canada. Jerry says, "when counseling clients, we discuss all aspects of owning/operating a small business, such as help with startup information, government paperwork and bureaucracy, employee deductions, book-keeping, marketing, taxation, as well as the economy upturns/downturns and more."

The SLBDC provides an on-site Resource Library as well as a Computer Resource Room, both open Monday to Friday, 9.a.m. – 5 p.m. The library contains hundreds of publications of interest to small businesses on a wide range of topics. The computer room contains 12 workstations with internet access and a laser printer.

The Sarnia-Lambton Business Development Corp. is located at 109 Durand Street, Sarnia and can be reached at 519-383-1371, website www.SLBDC.com. If you are an entrepreneur thinking of starting your own business, or an existing owner/operator in need of assistance, the SLBDC is available to help you.