

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Opportunity and Informed Decisions: My Path to Entrepreneurship**

**By** Ray York, Business Counselor for the Sheboygan County Economic Development Corporation (SCEDC) and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at UW-Green Bay

Sheboygan County, WI – A key mission of the Sheboygan County Economic Development Corporation (SCEDC) is to provide opportunities to county entrepreneurs and help them make informed business decisions. Since 2014, the SCEDC and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at UW-Green Bay (UWGB) have collaborated on dozens of projects that have resulted in the investment of tens of millions of dollars, and the creation of hundreds of jobs. In 2018 this collaboration created my position, a shared role between both organizations, as a business counselor to work with local entrepreneurs.

It has been a great effort in shared SCEDC and SBDC resources to provide the County with a solid support system for area business. With direct access to the state SBDC network and UW-Extension support systems, the business planning process for area entrepreneurs has become more impactful. Sheboygan County consistently ranks as one of the highest-producing counties in small business capital formation and business starts in the state. We have been blessed with a string of great SBDC counselors including Chuck Brys, Tara Carr, Jim Hauer, and, most recently, my counterpart, Dave Stauffacher. Dave is the UWGB outreach specialist of the Cofrin School of Business and business counselor for the SBDC at UWGB who was named the 2019 State Star Award winner for the state of Wisconsin.

My path of providing opportunity and helping others contribute to the economic success and growth of Sheboygan County has been a rewarding journey. In 2016, together with my wife, we formed York Estates Inc and purchased The Rochester Inn in Sheboygan Falls, WI. Though I didn't know it at the time, my entrepreneurial adventure started with my first stay at a Wisconsin bed and breakfast; it was inviting and filled with unexpected experiences to remember. My plan to become an innkeeper myself was inspired by my own travel experiences at small inns throughout the past 20 years. Once my dream was close-in-hand it was about creating contacts, making informed choices, and implementing a plan to turn our dream into reality.

While starting a business was a great achievement, the most important work followed the purchase of the business. A strategic mission of our business plan was to increase our engagement with the local community. My family is not originally from Sheboygan County; our only experience with the area had been for vacation and recreational activities, and our plan was to commute from outside of the county. We quickly realized that involvement and networking with local organizations was essential for business and personal growth. Being elected to the board of the Sheboygan Falls Chamber-Main Street, participating in the Economic Development Committee, and working as the Tourism Liaison for the Tourism Committee was a huge stepping stone in creating connections. As a business counselor, I educate future entrepreneurs on the critical importance of this element of business planning.

After our first year in business, I recognized an opportunity for expansion of our hospitality business within our local market. My plan was driven by a 'heritage tourism' strategy, and it presented a plan to save one of the oldest buildings in Sheboygan County. The business plan was well-researched, explored alternate forms of funding including historical tax credits, grants, revolving loan funds, and energy efficiency financing, and created key contacts that provided the information needed to make an informed decision. Ultimately, the planning process proved that execution of the plan would not be a profitable business decision. Initially, this felt like a failure...but I realized that success came from learning at an early stage, before any investment was made, that this would not be a sound fiscal decision. This experience reinforced to me how important it is to have a sound plan in the start-up or business expansion phase, and to have that plan vetted by trusted advisors.

It has been one year since I began my path as business counselor at the SCEDC and the SBDC at UWGB. Guiding others, and providing a pathway for them to make informed decisions that will turn their ideas and dreams into a feasible and successful business, is my passion...from ideation, to strategic planning, and finally, with execution and driving positive results. In 2018 I attended the annual dinner for the Sheboygan Falls Chamber-Main Street and the room was filled with people being recognized for their successes within the community. One Chamber member received an award for 170 years in business, and it was a special moment to see the continued success within Sheboygan County. It inspired me to achieve more, to help other inspiring entrepreneurs, and to branch out from my role as owner/innkeeper of The Rochester Inn. Opportunity is a landmark of economic success and the entrepreneur helps lead the way for our communities! I welcome the continued opportunity to drive growth in Sheboygan County.

For more information about SCEDC entrepreneurial services please email or call at [info@SheboyganCountyEDC.com](mailto:info@SheboyganCountyEDC.com) or call (920)452-2479

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***Attachment: SCEDC logo, SBDC logo, Opportunity JPEG***

*The Sheboygan County Economic Development Corporation (SCEDC) is a countywide private/public partnership, leading economic development efforts to improve the economic wellbeing and long-term prosperity of the businesses, residents and communities of Sheboygan County, through collaborative retention, expansion and attraction efforts for business and employment development. The SCEDC leverages a variety of tools available to encourage business growth and job creation. Key performance indicators tapped by SCEDC track and measure businesses assisted and resources leveraged. By applying many tools to assist businesses and communities and help them succeed, SCEDC achieves increased economic prosperity for Sheboygan County.*

