

GarCo Sewing Works Training and Design Center

In August of 2011, Beth Shaw, Executive Director of Customized Business Services at Colorado Mountain College, had no idea that attending a women's networking event through the Glenwood Springs Chamber Resort Association would lead to an exciting new project that has the potential to make significant economic impact in the Roaring Fork Valley. While attending the networking event, Beth began a conversation with Doreen Herriott, a local business woman with more than 15 years of experience in the garment industry, about her ideas for developing a local textile manufacturing facility. Soon after Beth and Doreen's encounter, they brought Jill Ziemann, Director of CMC's Women in Transition and Go 2 Work initiatives, into their discussions and GarCo Sewing Works Training and Design Center was born!

The Sewing Works is a nonprofit organization that will provide new skills to help individuals become more self-sufficient and employable in today's tight job market. Having started a number of businesses herself over the years, Shaw knew that this young organization needed to have proper guidance and mentoring in order to ensure its success. As a member of the Roaring Fork Business Resource Center's Board of Directors, Shaw knew that the Center would be a valuable resource.



“Randi and the Center were a tremendous source of information for us during the first few months,” said Shaw. “We were provided with cash flow projection templates that allowed us to see what kind of funding we really needed to get this project going. Randi also worked with us on creating a business plan, which was integral for us to have before making any requests for funding from government entities or lenders.”

In December of 2011, Garfield County agreed to provide the Sewing Works an initial grant of \$28,000 to aid in the purchase of industrial equipment and supplies. And, the County agreed to provide the Sewing Works with additional financial support by covering their rent at the historic Henry Building in Rifle. The County also reconfigured the space to ensure the operating needs were met.

“Randi also provided us with some fabulous introductions when we were researching locations for the facility and directed us to other organizations issuing grants,” said Shaw. “We’re confident that we’ll be able to secure additional funding through those organizations in the months to come.”

The organizers of the Sewing Works were also introduced to Bruce Christensen of Mountain Valley Developmental, who wrote a letter of support for the organization during their quest for funding from Garfield County, and he suggested there could be some partnering opportunities between the Sewing Works and Mountain Valley Developmental in the future.

After the decision was made by the City of Aspen and Town of Carbondale to ban plastic bags, the Sewing Works entered into an agreement with Community Office for Resource Efficiency (CORE) to manufacture bags to be distributed in the communities implementing the ban. The initial order of 1,700 soon turned into an order for 5,000, and the Sewing Works is now producing 300 bags per week to deliver to CORE for distribution. Donations of fabric have also come into the Sewing Works from companies like Big Agnes and North Face, as well as from an automobile upholstery mill in South Carolina.

Ultimately, the Sewing Works intends to become self-sustainable through the profits made on the products manufactured. Their hope is to move forward with more elaborate industrial sewing projects, such as creating small sample lots for designers who are turned down by larger manufacturing facilities – all while helping provide local workers with the skills, business knowledge, and confidence the need to secure employment in the Valley.

“I feel that the Sewing Works has not only been successful in securing the funding they needed to get started, but has displayed the exact type of relationship building and partnering the Center likes to see with our clients,” said Randi Lowenthal, CEO of the Center. “The way Garfield County, private enterprise, the Sewing Works, and other area nonprofits, are coming together to create solid skills and jobs within our community is very exciting.”

For information on the GarCo Sewing Works Training and Design Center, please call Beth Shaw at 384-8519.