

One of the efforts responsible for the success of women-owned businesses is the Small Business Administration's Women's Business Center program. Currently, there are 59 centers in 36 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. These centers provide technical assistance, business information and counseling, and other specialized assistance to socially and economically disadvantaged women entrepreneurs. The services provided by women's business centers include assistance in gaining access to capital, procuring government contracts, and helping women to work their way off public assistance. In New Mexico alone, the six women's business centers run by the Women's Economic Self-Sufficiency Team (WESST Corp.), facilitated the start-up and growth of over 600 small businesses, provided technical assistance to over 3,500 client firms, and conducted business-training activities for over 6,000 individuals. Most importantly, 81 percent of the clientele of these women's business centers have been low-income individuals and 47 percent have been women of color.

The impact of women's business centers in New Mexico is illustrated through a number of success stories that were told by Agnes Noonan, Executive Director of the WESST Corp., during a recent hearing on women's business centers:

Heidi Monotya's desire to run her own firm grew out of the frustrations of working for years as a draftsman for a company which offered few benefits and no retirement opportunities. In 1989, Heidi took the leap, opening Builders Hardware of New Mexico, which sells commercial grade doors and frames and finish hardware. Heidi and WESST Corp. joined forces when Heidi attended an orientation meeting, and WESST Corp. granted Heidi a loan for a computer that enabled her to create a presence on the Internet and market more effectively to government agencies. Since 1993, Builders Hardware's gross sales have increased by 129 percent. A single mother, Heidi maintains a second office at home for after-school hours.

Two years ago, Diane Barrett was receiving food stamps, sleeping on a friend's floor and struggling to provide for her son. But she also had a background as a chef. In 1996, Diane approached WESST Corp.'s regional office in Las Cruces, which helped her create a business plan and receive a \$5,000 loan to open a bakery and café. Since then, Diane has expanded the seating area, added a dinner menu, and is currently employing 19 people. In 1998, Diane's Bakery and Café was selected as the Mainstreet Business of the Year in Silver City, New Mexico. Recently interviewed by the Travel Section of the New York Times, Diane is a great example of how hard work and commitment to a business pays off.

Norma Gomez, a native of Mexico, came to the United States in the 1980s. On welfare, with three children and limited proficiency with English, Norma had difficulty being taken seriously when the opportunity arose to open her own business. With her small savings, she opened her shop in a strip mall in Farmington, only to find the overhead exceeded her income. She came to WESST Corp. for help with planning, marketing and financing assistance. With technical assistance from WESST Corp., Norma relocated, adopted an inventory tracking system, and developed a long-term business plan. WESST Corp. also convinced suppliers to provide Norma with accounts and better terms. The result of these efforts was a 300% increase in profits in the first year.

Agnes Cordova, of Taos, New Mexico, has combined her cultural heritage with business acumen to create "Sube!"—a multimedia, bilingual educational program designed to teach Spanish to preschool and early elementary children. The set of flashcards, board game, videotapes with original music, and computer software have all been well received in the local area and plans are being hatched for broader marketing efforts. Each component is offered separately so that parents can afford the educational supplies that can supplement formal language education. Agnes is now planning to develop materials for older kids as well. By matching her heritage with business opportunity, Agnes is creating economic opportunity for herself and helping to preserve the unique culture of northern New Mexico.

Nevertheless, in spite of their demonstrated contributions to the national economy and to individual women—recent surveys and testimonials have highlighted that many women's business centers have been forced to cut back on services or prematurely close their doors when they lose the support of the Small Business Administration's Office of Women's Business Ownership. Today, 25 percent of the women's business centers initially funded by the SBA are closed—and of this 25 percent, many are only partly operational. In fact, while several of the WESST Corp. sites in New Mexico have already lost SBA funding and have been able to continue providing programs, others have suffered considerably in their work due to the loss of support.

To address this problem, I am introducing the Women's Business Centers Sustainability Act of 1999. This legislation will allow re-competition for Federal funding by Women's Business Centers which have completed a funding term, and will raise the authorization of appropriations for FY 2000 and FY 2001 Women Business Center funding from \$11 million to \$12 million per year. Additionally, the legislation will reserve 60 percent of these appropriations for grants to new centers—to continue to promote women's business centers in more communities throughout the nation as well as to ensure adequate, continuing support for established, effective centers.

The Women's Business Center program has helped countless women start and expand their own businesses. It is vital that we continue to support this valuable program. I invite and encourage all of my fellow Members of Congress to join me in supporting this program.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTION ON PELL GRANT FUNDING

HON. MICHAEL N. CASTLE

OF DELAWARE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 20, 1999

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join with my colleagues on the Committee on Education and the Workforce to introduce a resolution urging Congress and the President to increase funding for the Pell Grant Program and existing Campus-Based Aid Programs.

The Pell Grant Program was first authorized in 1972 in the Higher Education Act Amendments. It has become the largest need-based federal higher education scholarship program and is considered the foundation for all federal student aid. The purpose of the Pell Grant Program is to assist students from low income families who would not otherwise be financially

able to attend a postsecondary institution by providing grants to students to pay the costs of attending the college of their choice. In the late 1970s, the Pell Grant Program covered 75 percent of the average cost of attending a public 4-year college. By the late 1990s, however, it has only covered 36 percent of the cost of attending a public 4-year college.

Families across the country are concerned about the rising cost of a college education, and for children from low income families, the cost of college continues to be an overwhelming factor in their decision not to attend. Children from high income families are almost twice as likely to enroll in college as compared with children from low income families. This is particularly noteworthy given the fact that higher education promotes economic opportunity for individuals and economic competitiveness for our nation. The Pell Grant Programs and Campus-Based Aid Programs help to begin to fill the cost gaps that will, in turn, encourage students from low income families to attend college.

Over the past few years, I have been pleased to support an increase in the Pell Grant maximum. Last year, under the Higher Education Amendments, the Committee on Education and the Workforce increased the authorization to a maximum grant level of \$4,500 for 1999–2000, with annual increases of at least \$300 thereafter. However, the maximum Pell Grant appropriated has historically not kept pace with inflation and when college tuition increases are factored in, the buying power of the Pell Grant has been significantly reduced.

Providing access to higher education for students across the nation is vitally important, and while I believe that colleges have the primary responsibility of ensuring that rate increases are fair and reasonable, I also believe that the Federal Government should assist students when postsecondary education is out of their reach.

I am pleased to join with my colleagues today who believe that need based grant aid for low-income students must be our number one priority in higher education funding.

H.C. BERGER BREWING COMPANY
OF COLORADO

HON. BOB SCHAFFER

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 20, 1999

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, last week, I visited several small businesses in Fort Collins, Colorado involved in beer making. Northern Colorado is fast becoming known for its growing number of high-quality, small brewers, in addition to being home of America's largest breweries.

Beer is a significant industry in Colorado's Fourth Congressional district supporting agriculture suppliers, farmers, shippers, and others. Among the manufacturers I visited was the H.C. Berger Brewing Company of Fort Collins.

Mr. Speaker, the H.C. Berger Brewing Company, rapidly establishing a name throughout much of the U.S. as a maker of superior quality beers, finds its strength in family tradition. Owners Peter and Bob Davidoff trace their family's culinary roots back to the Café Schiller in turn-of-the-century Berlin; at one time,