

BUSINESS STRATEGY

Small business programs launch in Oklahoma

Oklahoma businesses still need our help and JPMorgan Chase has made an investment to help small businesses in our state. Progress OKC and the Tulsa Economic Development Corp. are using that support to launch programs to help business owners and entrepreneurs, especially those in underserved communities, as they fight to recover from the COVID-19 economic downturn.

The program in Oklahoma City, called the Building Business Back Better program, features one-on-one development services focused on small business operations, customer attraction, capital access and strategic growth, all at little or no charge to the business owner.

The program is designed to help existing small businesses struggling to maintain revenue in the pandemic, business owners looking to secure capital to maintain or grow their operations and entrepreneurs interested in gaining knowledge about business strategy, capital and resources during an uncertain time.



CATHY O'CONNOR

The Tulsa Economic Development Coalition is establishing a program called Sky's the Limit, a virtual coaching and mentoring platform that will offer business owners access to strategic guidance from both local and national experts. Tulsa will also launch an accelerator that identifies franchise-worthy, single-site businesses and guides them through the franchise development process.

Business owners and leaders who want to connect with others and learn more about these programs are invited to join upcoming virtual roundtable events "The Road to Recovery: Supporting Oklahoma Small Businesses" on Thursday, February 25. Progress OKC will host an event at noon, and TEDC will host an event following that, at 1:30 p.m. Both events will share details of the new programs and how to access support. The Oklahoma City event will discuss small business readiness and response, crisis management, small business support including access to capital and economic recovery and resiliency. Speakers include Mayor David Holt and a variety of small business owners, consultants and economic development professionals.

At a time when small businesses have been faced with revenue loss, supply delays and changing regulations, these business support programs supported by JPMorgan Chase are important steps for small businesses in Oklahoma to find support and access to capital.

To learn more about Progress OKC's virtual event, visit theallianceokc.org. You can also stay connected through Facebook and Instagram @progressokccdc

Contact TEDC for more information about their programs or virtual event. You can also stay connected through Facebook and LinkedIn @TEDCCreativeCapital

Cathy O'Connor is president of The Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City.

ON THE TOWN

Reflect on Girl Scout values; honor memory of Birdwell

The annual luncheon benefiting Girl Scouts Western Oklahoma always is a great event with an excellent speaker, innovative Girl Scout cookie desserts and interesting information about what's happening with this organization.

This year, the Juliette Low Leadership Society has gone virtual due to the pandemic, but much of the experience we have come to love about it is still there. Don't miss the opportunity to check out the fundraiser's videos, including those featuring the mother-daughter duo



LILLIE-BETH BRINKMAN

Irene and Margo Gianos, co-CEOs and founders of the beauty brand Honestly Margo, and one honoring community leader Kay Goebel as honorary chairman and GIRL (go-getter, innovator, risk-taker, leader). Instead of serving as keynote speakers, the Gianos were interviewed by members of the Girl Scouts. Three separate videos will feature them discussing leadership, entrepreneurship and ambition, key themes of the Girl

Scout mission.

To support the Girl Scouts, buy a raffle ticket for \$25 before Feb. 25 for one of several packages, including a stay in a private cottage at an Oregon vineyard.

Sponsors include the Chickasaw Nation, Corner Energy LLC, Devon Energy, the Inasmuch Foundation, Nedra Funk, Kay Goebel, Jean McLaughlin, Jeaneen Naifeh, Polly Nichols, OG&E, Lil Ross, and Sonic Drive-In.

Virtual "luncheon" co-chairmen are Patty Brumbaugh and Kim Mosburg. To donate, buy a raffle ticket and view the videos, go to gswestok.org/jlls.

Of note

Oklahoma City University's noted and longtime voice professor, Florence Birdwell, has died at age 96. She trained Broadway stars like Kristin Chenoweth and Kelli O'Hara and hundreds of other performers on stages around the world, according to information from OCU.

"If you're lucky, you get one teacher who is YOUR PERSON. Mine is Florence Birdwell," Chenoweth wrote on Twitter. "Your voice rings in my ear forever, Florence. RIP Mrs.

Birdwell. I will miss you as long as I live."

O'Hara also paid tribute to Birdwell on Twitter, as did many others nationally, remembering her lessons and her words.

Birdwell graduated from OCU in 1945 with a bachelor's degree in fine arts and in 1969 with a master's degree in teaching. She served on OCU's faculty for 67 years, retiring in 2014. OCU awarded Birdwell with an honorary doctorate in musical arts in 2016.

"She is a true icon of Oklahoma City University and today we honor her legacy and remember all she contributed to our students," OCU President Martha Burger said in a news release.

In 2015, she traveled to New York, where two of her students – O'Hara and Chenoweth – were nominated for Tony Awards in the same category at the same time. O'Hara won for "The King and I" and recognized her former teacher in her acceptance speech.

To learn more or donate to OCU's Robert & Florence Birdwell Endowed Vocal Scholarship in her honor, go to okcu.edu/birdwell.

Have an item of note? Email lilliebeth@yahoo.com.

GUEST COLUMN

Scholarships lay foundation for stronger community

Some kids know they are bound for college, while others are not so sure. There are lots of reasons students might hold back from taking the next step in their educations.

Maybe no one in their family has been to college, or maybe they have lost a parent, or their family has experienced other hardships. Of course, college is expensive and paying for it can be difficult.

Regardless of the reason, it is tragic when a young person wants to go to college but does not have the support they need. Sometimes, all it takes is a little push, and you never know what might happen. The Oklahoma City Community



NANCY ANTHONY

Foundation has given thousands of Oklahoma high school students financial encouragement over the years, and we've watched them graduate and start successful careers. Some have even become lawyers, doctors, Ph.D.s and business leaders.

We have a number of missions at the Community Foundation, and scholarships are among the most important. In fact, the OCCF has the largest privately funded scholarship program in the state, awarding \$2.5 million in scholarships each spring.

But we're not just focusing on the

most gifted and talented students. We are also looking for the A and B students who are working hard in school and trying to make a difference in their communities. We have programs for students who need a leg up, such as kids from the foster care system or students from single-parent homes.

We began our scholarship program more than 30 years ago through funding from the estate of E.K. Gaylord, founder and publisher of *The Oklahoman*. We have expanded the program with contributions from donors, such as Willie Elizabeth Shipley, who created a scholarship fund in 1983 for western Oklahoma high school students. Following the Murrah Building bombing in 1995, the OCCF used \$4 million in contributions to create a scholarship fund for bombing victims' children, providing a full ride to more than 140 students.

That was just the beginning. Today, we have hundreds of scholarships, and each year, new contributors establish scholarships of their own. People understand the importance of higher education and they want to support generations to come. But administering scholarships can be difficult, and that is where we can help as donors customize their scholarships to support students as they face increasing costs. In Oklahoma, those costs have increased nearly 40% over the past decade.

Our scholarship program targets

a variety of student interests and circumstances, resulting in scholarships well-suited for just about everyone. Scholarship amounts range from \$2,000 to \$20,000 and most allow students to attend any school they want, regardless of location.

In addition to those programs, the OCCF has created three additional scholarship programs for student groups that may need extra encouragement. We provide Oklahoma Youth Promise Scholarships to young people from Oklahoma's foster care system, and the New Opportunity Scholars program is for kids who are the first in their families to attend college. The Community Foundation Scholars program is for high school students with grade point averages between 3.25 and 3.79 and are established leaders in their schools. These three programs range from \$2,000 to \$3,000 and go to as many as 240 students each year.

The Community Foundation is in the business of investing in the Oklahoma City community to enhance quality of life. Each year, we invest in about 800 students because college educations help build successful citizens and successful citizens are at the foundation of successful communities. Applications for the next school year are being accepted now at OCCF.academicworks.com.

Nancy Anthony is president of the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, www.OCCF.org.