

THE NETWORK

A QUARTERLY NEWS & EVENT PUBLICATION OF MICROCREDIT-NH • www.microcredithn.org

MicroCredit-NH

Working for people who work for themselves



Brenda Vance, MicroCredit-NH member and owner of *Head East Salon, LLC* in North Woodstock, works with a client.

Photo by Geoff Forester, Concord, NH

MicroCredit-NH is a non-profit program of the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund. Its mission is to increase the income and economic stability of the self-employed by providing access to business development education, financial resources, technical assistance, and expanded market opportunities.

MicroCredit-NH Implements Self-Employment Health Insurance Initiative

DEDUCTIBLE. CO-PAY. HMO. Health Savings Account. What do these terms really mean? Employees of larger companies often enjoy the benefit of working with a human resource person to determine the best option for their personal situation – but what if you are self-employed? How would you navigate the countless options available to obtain cost-effective health insurance?

With approximately **66%** of the *state's uninsured* being *self-employed* or working in small businesses with 2 to 10 employees (Office of Health Planning and Medicaid, NH Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), MicroCredit-NH recognized that the majority of the **144,000 microenterprise employees** (U.S. Census 2002) in *New Hampshire* could be uninsured. As a provider of statewide

small business support, MicroCredit-NH decided to undertake a health insurance initiative to assist the self-employed with participating in the insurance system.

"The cost of insurance coverage is a national concern," said Sarah Littlefield, Assistant Director of MicroCredit-NH, who has been managing this initiative since its inception. "MicroCredit-NH is not able to influence the price of insurance, but we can help the self-employed better understand what is available and what may be most appropriate for their circumstances."

Through a planning grant from the Endowment for Health, MicroCredit-NH conducted health insurance market research and surveyed a cross-section of its membership. This research identified a gap in impartial information for potential or existing health insurance consumers – particularly those that are self-employed and lack access to human resource professionals. The project also helped determine what measures may be undertaken to help self-employed people obtain – or keep – health insurance.

In September of 2005, MicroCredit-NH started work on its "Understanding the Market" health insurance project, with continued funding from the Endowment for Health. The purpose of this project is to create an interactive web-based tool for the self-employed. The website will provide basic information on health insurance terminology, guidance on how to compare plans and tips on working with an insurance broker. It will also offer budgeting tools to assist individuals and businesses with insurance decisions.

As this project unfolds, MicroCredit-NH will continue its dialogue with members, statewide partners and policymakers, in order to provide appropriate health insurance resources that will educate and empower the self-employed. *

More information about this project will be available as it continues. Stay tuned! To learn more about the Endowment for Health, visit www.endowmentforhealth.org.

Tapping into the Statewide Network: Two Members Connect

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN a potter from Portsmouth and a drum maker from New London partner? A series of four lively workshops for participants to create their own pottery-based Native American drums and practice spirituality.

Wendy Walter, owner of *Voice of Clay* and Jane E. King, a Native American drum builder, launched a series of Drum Making workshops this past summer after meeting at MicroCredit-NH's 2004 Microenterprise Day.

"This partnership is an excellent example of how two business owners were able to connect within a larger network of self-employed people, and expand their product offerings to the public," said Rob Riley, Director of MicroCredit-NH.

Both businesswomen share an interest in spirituality, which is instilled in their work. Wendy inscribes many of her pottery pieces with words like "grow," "achieve" and "see" to promote a philosophy of "conscious living." Jane is an energy healer,

workshop facilitator and builder of Native American drums that she calls, "Medicine Drums." Jane recently opened *King Hypnosis and Healing* in Concord with her husband, Richard. They offer stress reduction, increased relaxation and pain management solutions. Jane also holds Medicine Drum workshops all over New England, to continue the Native American traditions of natural healing to foster a spiritual connection to the earth.

After Wendy was inspired in a training that included meditative drumming, she contacted Jane with her workshop series idea. Wendy proposed three workshops for participants to design, fire and glaze hourglass-shaped pottery bases for the drums. The fourth, and final, session would be facilitated by Jane to complete the drums – including stretching rawhide over the bases and decorating it. Jane was thrilled with the concept, and together they planned the series for August 2005 at Wendy's studio.

"I was excited to be collaborating with a MicroCredit-NH member from another part of the state – it felt very synchronistic," said Jane.

Jane normally builds Medicine Drums on a maple wooden circular frame that is 15 inches in diameter and three inches wide. "Learning something new is so valuable to a business," Wendy commented. "If we're meeting our needs and growing as individuals, our businesses will grow, too."

Jane belongs to MicroCredit-NH's Newport "Sugar River Business Support Group." She recently took out a \$1,500 loan for professional development training to help her meet client needs. Wendy has



Workshop participants decorate the hides of their pottery-based drums.

been a longtime member of the "Empowered Entrepreneurs" group in Dover, through which she borrowed \$3,000 to buy glazing equipment and to help launch a new product line. She later accessed \$5,000 for materials to fulfill export orders to Ireland. Her successful repayment of loans allowed Wendy to build her credit history, and access traditional bank financing to meet the demands of her rapidly growing business.

Wendy and Jane plan to repeat their workshop series, and encourage other MicroCredit-NH members to find ways of collaborating in order to learn from one another and to develop as business owners. *

For more information about Voice of Clay, visit www.voiceofclay.com. To learn more about Jane's Medicine Drum building, visit www.medicinedrums.com. Information about MicroCredit-NH's next Microenterprise Day, being scheduled for the Fall of 2006, will soon be available.

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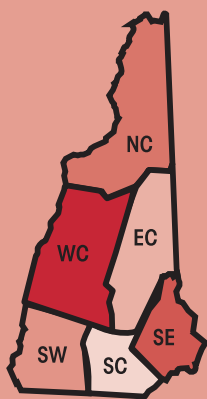
7 Wall Street
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MicroCredit-NH

Check out our website for Networking Tips...
www.microcredithn.org

CALENDAR

OFFICE HOURS / PROGRAM ORIENTATIONS



MICROCREDIT-NH REGIONS

- North Country (NC)
- West Central (WC)
- East Central (EC)
- South West (SW)
- South Central (SC)
- South East (SE)

What is a Business Group?

MicroCredit-NH delivers its services through local Business Groups that are comprised of self-employed individuals and small business owners. Business Group members are able to access MicroCredit-NH's services, including business education, loan capital, the Individual Development Account (IDA) matched savings program, networking opportunities and technical assistance. **There are currently over 50 Business Groups statewide with more than 350 members.**

Featured Member Businesses – Support a Local Microenterprise!

Belmont: ROZtech Computer Services. Sharon Nix, (603) 524-2418 or www.roztechnh.com.

Campton: Clay's Chocolate Shop. Joan and George Clay, (603) 726-7744 or www.clayschocolates.com.

Center Barnstead: Books by the Numbers, LLC (Bookkeeping Services). Kimberly Perkins, (603) 381-1987 or www.booksbythenumbers.com.

Concord: Daddy's Food Company, Inc. (Daddy's Table Sauce). Don Mathews, (603) 344-1336 or www.daddysfood.com.

Franconia: Gale River Motel, LLC. Kevin Johnson, (603) 823-5655 or www.galerivermotel.com.

Harrisville: Compass Financial Group. R. Dean Ogelby, (603) 827-3022 or www.cfg3.com.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MicroCredit-NH is generously supported by Citizens Bank, Providian Bank, the City of Nashua, the City of Manchester, the Clowes Fund, Corporation for Enterprise Development, Samuel P. Hunt Foundation, NH Community Development Finance Authority, NH Community Development Block Grant Program, and is endorsed by all NH County Commissions.

The Network Content:
Tara Dolphin
Marketing and Communications Manager,
MicroCredit-NH

The Network Design:
Teresa Troy, VCA, Nottingham, NH

Office Hours sessions provide the opportunity to meet individually with a Regional Manager to learn more about the business resources available through the MicroCredit-NH program. **Program Orientations** are group sessions, and are the first requirement of MicroCredit-NH membership. **Registration is required.**

NORTH COUNTRY REGION

Joyce Presby, Regional Manager
To schedule an appointment, contact Joyce at (603) 620-0745 or jpresby@microcreditnh.org

OFFICE HOURS

Berlin
Woodlands Credit Union
730 Main Street
Friday, 3/10, 9 – 11 AM

Bethlehem
North Country Council
107 Glessner Road
Thursday, 2/2, 2 – 4 PM

Gorham
Gorham Family Resource Center
123 Main Street
Wednesday, 1/11, 4 – 6 PM

Lincoln
Lincoln Town Office, 148 Main Street
Wednesday, 3/22, 10 AM – 12 PM

WEST CENTRAL REGION

Janet Cote, Regional Manager
To schedule an appointment, contact Janet at (603) 620-0319 or jcote@microcreditnh.org

OFFICE HOURS

Bristol
Grafton County Economic Development Council
10 North Main Street, 2nd Floor
Tuesday, 1/17, 1 – 3 PM
Tuesdays, 2/21 and 3/21, 10 AM – 12 PM

Campton
Waterville Valley Region Chamber of Commerce, 12 Vintinner Road
By appointment only

Lebanon
Listen Center, 60 Hanover Street
Tuesdays, 1/10, 2/14 and 3/14, 2 – 4 PM

New London
Carriage House Community Meeting Room
124 Newport Road
Thursdays, 2/2 and 3/2, 4 – 6 PM

Plymouth
Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
1 Foster Street
Tuesdays, 1/17, 2/7 and 3/7
10 AM – 12 PM

Tilton
Twin Rivers Community Corporation
608 West Main Street
Thursdays, 1/12, 2/9 and 3/9
11 AM – 1 PM

EAST CENTRAL REGION

To register, contact Candace Whittemore at 1-800-769-3482 or cwhittemore@microcreditnh.org

OFFICE HOURS

Center Conway
Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council
1620 East Main Road
Thursdays, 1/12, 2/9 and 3/9
10 AM – 12 PM

Laconia
Laconia Area Community Land Trust
658 Union Avenue
Tuesdays, 1/24, 2/21 and 3/21, 2 – 4 PM

Wolfeboro
Wentworth Economic Development Corporation (WEDCO)
Citizens Bank building, 7 Center Street (Junction of Routes 128 & 109)
Tuesdays, 1/31, 2/28 and 3/28
10 AM – 12 PM

PROGRAM ORIENTATION

Meredith
Meredith Public Library, 91 Main Street
Wednesday, 2/1, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

SOUTH WEST REGION

Robin Picard, Regional Manager
To register, contact Robin at (603) 620-1269 or rpicard@microcreditnh.org

PROGRAM ORIENTATIONS

Claremont
Fiske Library, 108 Broad Street
Thursday, 3/9, 6 – 8 PM

Jaffrey
Jaffrey Civic Center, 40 Main Street
Tuesday, 1/24, 6 – 8 PM

Milford
Wadleigh Memorial Library
49 Nashua Street
Wednesday, 2/8, 6 – 8 PM

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

To register, contact Candace Whittemore at 1-800-769-3482 or cwhittemore@microcreditnh.org

OFFICE HOURS

Concord
New Hampshire Community Loan Fund
7 Wall Street
Fridays, 1/20, 2/17 and 3/17, 2 – 4 PM

Derry
Derry Public Library
64 East Broadway Street
Thursdays, 1/12, 2/9 and 3/9, 6 – 8 PM

Nashua
Business Information Center
151 Main Street
Wednesdays, 1/25 and 2/22
10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

PROGRAM ORIENTATIONS

Concord
New Hampshire Community Loan Fund
7 Wall Street
Monday, 3/27, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Derry
Derry Public Library
64 East Broadway Street
Monday, 1/30, 6 – 8 PM

Manchester
Amoskeag Small Business Incubator
33 South Commercial Street
Tuesday, 2/22, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Nashua
Chandler Memorial Library
257 Main Street
Thursday, 3/16, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

SOUTH EAST REGION

Jennifer Murphy, Regional Manager
To register, contact Jennifer at (603) 496-0520 or jmurphy@microcreditnh.org

OFFICE HOURS

Dover
Café on the Corner, 478 Central Avenue
Thursdays, 1/5, 2/2 and 3/2
2 – 4 PM

Portsmouth
Me & Ollies Café, 10 Pleasant Street
Market Square
Thursdays, 1/26, 2/23 and 3/23
2 – 4 PM

Raymond
Ocean National Savings Bank
55 Main Street
Thursdays, 1/19, 2/16 and 3/16
2 – 4 PM

Rochester
Citizens Bank, 1 North Main Street
Thursdays, 1/12, 2/9 and 3/9
2 – 4 PM

PROGRAM ORIENTATION

Exeter
Orientation for a local Arts Business Group
Exeter High School, 30 Linden Street
Wednesday, 1/11, 4 – 6 PM

NOTE: Business Group meetings are not listed in The Network. Prospective members should contact the appropriate MicroCredit-NH Regional Manager for information.

WORKSHOP REGISTRATION FORM

Members and non-members must register for MicroCredit-NH workshops in advance. *Unless otherwise stated in the workshop descriptions, fees are \$5 per workshop for members and \$10 per workshop for non-members. Scholarships are available.*

Name: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Daytime Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Workshop Name	Town of Workshop	Date	Time	Fee

TOTAL FEE _____

HOW TO REGISTER:

1. Call MicroCredit-NH at 1-800-769-3482 or complete and mail the registration form above.
2. Send registration form and check to: MicroCredit-NH, 7 Wall Street, Concord, NH 03301, Attention: Candace.
3. Make check payable to: MicroCredit-NH.
4. Indicate workshop name and location on memo line of check.

WORKSHOPS

Unless otherwise stated below, please contact Candace Whittemore at 1-800-769-3482 (email: cwhittemore@microcredithn.org) for more information and registration. Workshop fees are \$5 for Business Group members and \$10 for non-members.

Note: Registration Form on opposite page. ←

Berlin

Location: Woodlands Credit Union
730 Main Street

Co-sponsor: Valley Ventures
(MicroCredit-NH Business Group)

1. Marketing Material Overview

Friday, 1/13, 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Assess your current marketing materials to determine their effectiveness and learn techniques to improve them.

2. Market Planning

Friday, 2/10, 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Find out how to create and use a marketing plan to grow your business.

Bethlehem

Location: WREN, 2011 Main Street

Business Development Series: Two-part Seminars

1. Thursdays, 1/5 and 1/19, 9 AM – 12 PM

2. Tuesdays, 3/7 and 3/14, 5 – 8 PM

Learn about critical business issues for developing a viable business, including: business fundamentals, financial management, marketing, planning and evaluation.

Cost: Free for WREN members and MicroCredit-NH members, \$35 for non-members (this fee also provides the participant with an individual WREN membership)

Bristol

Location: Newfound Regional High School
150 Newfound Road

Starting, or Re-starting, Your Business Series

Wednesdays, 1/11, 1/25, 2/8 and 2/22
6:30 – 8:30 PM

This four-part series will help refine your business concept and identify necessary support systems. Topics include: Business Planning Overview; Market Planning; Understanding Your Finances and Cash Flow; and Putting Your Plans Together.

Cost: \$20 for MicroCredit-NH members, \$40 for non-members

Concord

Location: New Hampshire Community
Loan Fund, 7 Wall Street

Marketing 101

Tuesday, 1/17, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Learn how to use marketing as a strategic tool to ensure business success.

Dover

Location: Dover Public Library
73 Locust Street

Marketing on a Shoestring

Tuesday, 2/7, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Marketing is essential for growing and maintaining a business, but it doesn't have to cost a fortune. Learn low-cost marketing and publicity techniques to reach potential customers and create awareness.

Featured speaker: Tara Dolphin, Marketing and Communications Manager, MicroCredit-NH

Franklin

1. Location: Career Networks, Franklin
Business Center, 20 Canal Street

IDA Program Presentation

Wednesday, 2/15, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

The Individual Development Account (IDA) program is a matched savings opportunity for income eligible households. Savings are matched 3 to 1 for the purchase of a first home; higher education; or assets required for a small business. Eligibility requirements will be discussed.

Sponsors: Casey Family Services, Franklin Asset Building Coalition, NH Community Loan Fund, MicroCredit-NH, Concord Area Trust for Community Housing (CATCH) and Career Networks

Cost: None

2. Location: Twin Rivers Intergenerational
Program (TRIP) Center, 20 Canal Street

IDA Application Session

Saturday, 2/18, 9 AM – 3 PM

Receive assistance with your IDA application.

Cost: None

Note: This session will take place in conjunction with the Franklin Asset Building Coalition's Free Tax Preparation Session. Additional tax preparation sessions will be held on Saturdays, 1/28, 2/4 and 2/11. Call the Coalition at (603) 934-3315 for more information and tax preparation appointments.

Gorham

Location: Gorham Family Resource Center
123 Main Street

Roundtable Discussions

Wednesdays, 1/11, 2/8 and 3/8

6:30 – 8:30 PM

A different small business topic will be discussed each evening, including fundamental financial and marketing concepts. Planning and analysis tools will be used.

Cost: Free for MicroCredit-NH members, \$25 for non-members (for materials)

Groveton

Location: Northumberland Public Library
22 State Street

Roundtable Discussions

Wednesdays, 1/18, 2/15 and 3/15

6 – 8 PM

See Gorham description above for details/cost.

Jaffrey

Location: Jaffrey Civic Center, 40 Main Street

Writing a Press Release to Create Awareness of Your Business

Tuesday, 1/10, 6 – 8 PM

Market your business using press releases and other low-cost techniques.

Featured speaker: Tara Dolphin,
MicroCredit-NH

Jefferson

Location: St. Agnes Church, Route 2

Co-sponsor: Jefferson Business Association
(MicroCredit-NH Business Group)

1. Talking Shop with Your Accountant

Tuesday, 1/17, 7 – 8 PM

Do you know what business tax deductions you can take? This workshop will cover the terminology and standard financial systems needed to ensure you and your accountant are prepared for tax season.

2. To LLC or not to LLC...

Tuesday, 2/21, 7 – 8 PM

Do you know whether your business should be a sole proprietorship, LLC, partnership, or a corporation? Learn about the different business types and legal issues involved with each one.

3. What's the Hype about Insurance?

Tuesday, 3/21, 7 – 8 PM

Find out about the different types of insurance and how to determine your business' needs.

Keene

Location: Keene High School, 43 Arch Street

Creating a Business Plan for Success: Four-Part Seminar

Tuesdays, 3/7, 3/14, 3/21 and 3/28

6 – 9 PM

Featured speakers: Gary Oden,
Regional Manager, SBDC and Tara Dolphin,
MicroCredit-NH

Learn to develop and utilize a business plan to operate and grow a successful business.

RSVP: Register through Keene Community Education only, at (603) 357-0088

Laconia

Location: Laconia High School
345 Union Avenue

Creating a Business Plan for Success: Four-Part Seminar

Thursdays, 1/26, 2/2, 2/9 and 2/16

6:30 – 8:30 PM

See Keene listing for description.

Cost: \$20 for MicroCredit-NH members,
\$40 for non-members

Lancaster

Location: Weeks Memorial Library
128 Main Street

Business Development Series: Five-Part Seminar

Wednesdays, 1/18, 2/15, 3/15, 4/19 and

5/17, 2 – 4 PM

Learn about critical business issues for developing a viable business, including: business fundamentals, financial management, marketing, planning and evaluation.

Cost: Free for MicroCredit-NH members,
\$25 for non-members (for materials)

Lebanon

Location: NH Employment Security
River Mill Complex, 85 Mechanic Street

1. Marketing with Shoestring Tools: Press Releases & Press Kits

Wednesday, 1/18, 10 AM – 12 PM

Learn how to market your business using press releases and press kits, and how they can secure a feature story.

2. Developing a Marketing Plan for Your Business

Wednesday, 3/15, 10 AM – 12 PM

Access the fundamentals of successful marketing plan development. Topics will include: customer and competitor research; analyzing research data; and targeting appropriate markets to build profits.

Littleton

Location: The Lane House, Cottage Street

Co-sponsor: Business Creations
(MicroCredit-NH Business Group)

1. Talking Shop with Your Accountant

Tuesday, 1/24, 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM

See Jefferson listing (at left) for description.

2. To LLC or not to LLC...

Tuesday, 3/28, 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Do you know whether your business should be a sole proprietorship, LLC, partnership, or a corporation? Learn about the different business types and legal issues involved with each one.

Manchester

1. Location: Amoskeag Small Business
Incubator, 33 South Commercial Street

Marketing Roundtable

Tuesday, 3/14, 12 – 2 PM

Discuss marketing ideas with other entrepreneurs. Bring your marketing materials and receive feedback and ideas for improvement.

2. Location: Manchester West Side Library
76 Main Street

Advanced Cash Flow

Wednesday, 3/17, 6 – 8 PM

Are you running a cost effective operation? Can you make critical decisions before problems arise by using your financial statements? Learn to translate financial statements into useful operations information.

3. Location: Nachos Taqueria
1001 Elm Street

Ronda de Negocios: Financing Your Business

Tuesday, 3/28, 10 AM – 12 PM

Financing options for small businesses and requirements for commercial loans will be discussed.

Meredith

Location: Meredith Public Library
91 Main Street

Business Start-up Basics

Wednesday, 3/1, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Do you have a great business idea? Not sure how to start a business and make it successful? Learn the basics of self-assessment; trade name registration; market research and planning; financials; and business planning.

Nashua

1. Location: Economic Opportunity Center
18 Technology Way

Time Management and Goal-setting

Tuesday, 2/7, 10 AM – 12 PM

How many times have you missed a deadline because you had too much to do and too little time? Learn strategies on how to avoid this common pitfall.

2. Location: Economic Opportunity Center
18 Technology Way

Marketing Series

Tuesdays, 2/7, 2/14, 2/21 and 2/28

5 – 7 PM

Is your small business in need of a fresh marketing strategy? This four-part workshop series will help you understand your market, customer base and competitors – in order to make informed marketing decisions.

3. Location: Business Information Center
151 Main Street

Bookkeeping and Accounting

Wednesday, 3/22, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Find out about the options available for small business bookkeeping systems.

4. Location: St. Louis de Gonzague
48 West Hollis Street

Ronda de Negocios: Marketing Roundtable Discussion

Thursday, 3/30, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Discuss marketing successes and challenges with your peers to help refine your strategy.

Portsmouth

Location: Portsmouth City Hall
Seibolt Building, 1 Junkins Avenue

Creative Business Strategies: Health and Life Insurance for Artists

Wednesday, 3/22, 9 – 11 AM

Insurance options for artists and arts-related businesses will be addressed.

Sponsors: MicroCredit-NH, Art-Speak,
Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce
and WEST

RSVP: Contact Art-Speak at (603) 610-7222
or info@art-speak.org

Cost: None

Rochester

Location: Rochester Community Center
150 Wakefield Street

Starting, or Re-Starting, Your Business Series

Wednesdays, 3/22, 3/29, 4/5 and 4/12

6:30 – 8:30 PM

This four-part series will help refine your business concept and identify necessary support systems. Topics include: Business Planning Overview; Market Planning; Understanding Your Finances and Cash Flow; and Putting Your Plans Together.

Cost: \$20 for MicroCredit-NH members,
\$40 for non-members

Featured speaker, 4/5: Warren Daniel,
Seacoast Regional Manager, SBDC

Wolfeboro

Location: WEDCO, Citizens Bank building,
7 Center Street (Junction of Routes 128 & 109)

Brown Bag Luncheon Workshop Series: Creating a Marketing Plan

Session # 1: Market Research

Tuesday, 3/28, 12 – 2 PM

Before a marketing plan can be written, customers and competitors must be understood. Learn about research resources, and how to compile data to define, analyze and target your most likely customer to rise above the competition. (Sessions focusing on Market Analysis, Market Plan and Marketing on a Shoestring strategies will be held in April, May and June, respectively.)

MEMBER PROFILE:

Manchester Business Reinvents How Computers “Think”

IT ALL STARTED at the town dump. The old adage that one man’s trash is another man’s treasure certainly rang true one day in 2001 for Richard Tango-Lowy. He picked up *The Society of Mind* by Marvin Minsky at the Litchfield town dump’s book exchange. The book focuses on how children learn and how the human mind functions, and Minsky’s theories sparked the idea for a new type of knowledge management software that would eventually become the basis for Rich’s own small business.

At the time, Rich was working in knowledge management for a leading technology corporation. But he recognized that existing knowledge software had a basic vocabulary problem: if users didn’t ask a question exactly as the database recognized it, it wouldn’t produce the answers required. For instance, if a new employee had to submit an invoice for an impatient vendor, he might ask the database, “How do I pay a vendor?” But the software would only know the question as “how to submit invoices,” and would not recognize the user’s question – rendering the employee helpless.

When Rich read Minsky’s book, the ideas started flowing. He discovered that people learn by connecting relevant thoughts into something cohesive. Rich decided there must be a way to capture knowledge the same way a person learns – to make businesses more effective and efficient by

sharing knowledge, rather than *managing* it. He realized if software could “think” and learn from the user, like a child learns from an adult, it would change the future of knowledge solutions. “I had to make a little kid!” Rich said.

Turning theory into practice

With a background in Physics and his years of information technology (IT) experience, Rich came up with “a simple, one-line code.” Inspired, Rich approached co-worker and master IT engineer, Rick Hickerson, with his idea. To test it, he and Rick decided they needed a computer to do the analysis. Where did they go? To the Brookline town dump’s re-use pile!

On their knees on Rick’s floor, the pair installed Linux software on the computer and figured out the code. Excitingly, it worked – and their web-based product, “Mindmeld,” was born, and so was a new business. Rich named his company *ars Cognita*, which is Latin for “The art of knowing/knowledge.”

Today, Rich, President; Rick, Chief Technology Officer; and Jane Carrabis, Service and Accounts Director, are full-time employees. The Manchester based-team also employs part-time marketing consultant Martha Parker. Over 4,000 customers worldwide now use Mindmeld (patent pending), including a global hotel chain, an IT company in South Africa and a cell phone company in the Netherlands.

Mindmeld works like a sticky note

According to Rich, Mindmeld “mimics the basic model of how a person learns, remembers concepts, and performs abstract thought.” For example, if a user were searching for their company’s photocopier repairperson, he could type, “Who is our photocopy representative?” Mindmeld would search for similar words or ideas, and produce a set of possible answers. The user might click on “Photocopy contact,” obtain the information, and inform Mindmeld the answer was useful – building its data, so that it becomes more accurate over time.

“Mindmeld works as if you were recording a sticky note,” Jane Carrabis explained. “It figures out what to do with the information, and how to get others to it. Mindmeld learns from its users – unlike other web-based search engines that produce the same results, regardless of the number of times a question has been asked.”

Mindmeld functions as a secure website that holds unique information for each group using it. It can be beneficial for employers of five people and up. “Everybody has the problem of how to effectively manage knowledge,” Rich said. “But most companies don’t deal with it until it is already a crisis. Mindmeld is a preventive solution that strengthens an organization in the long-term.”



The *ars Cognita* team. From left: Rich Tango-Lowy, Rick Hickerson and Jane Carrabis.

Mindmeld is platform independent, and therefore supports all types of databases. It is open-source, so anyone may download for free, which accounts for the large number of users globally. So how does Mindmeld generate revenue for *ars Cognita* if the software is free? “Easy!” Rich exclaimed. “We provide additional functions and features that companies are willing to pay for.” These include the abilities to use high-end database platforms like Oracle, MS SQL Server, or IBM’s DB2; search for knowledge from a cell phone or PDA; and create knowledge from any email. *ars Cognita* also provides software installation assistance, client training, ongoing ROI (return on investment) calculations, and customer support. Paying customers also receive free software upgrades.

Support from small business development programs

To grow his business, Rich accessed the resources of many local business development organizations, including MicroCredit-NH, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Amoskeag Small Business Incubator, Southern New Hampshire University, and SCORE. Rich was a founding member of MicroCredit-NH’s NRG Business Group in Manchester, and is currently repaying a \$5,000 loan he took out for Mindmeld’s patent application. He enjoys using MicroCredit-NH’s Tutorials and networking with his group members.

“MicroCredit-NH thinks of its member businesses as big businesses – even though they are small,” said Rich. “Business owners need two things: more time and more money. MicroCredit-NH is the only program that can lend more money to business owners without seeing a track record. It is phenomenal.”

The future of *ars Cognita* is bright. Plans include added services for customers, hosting solutions for smaller companies, and eventually, hiring more employees. The team is dedicated to staying private to continue building their vision of a company with, “good people doing good things, that are happy about it!” *

To learn more about *ars Cognita* and the Mindmeld product, contact the team at (603) 673-6333 or visit www.arscognita.com.

GROUP PROFILE:

These Empowered Entrepreneurs are Energetic – and Evolving

WHAT IS THE LIFE CYCLE of a MicroCredit-NH Business Group? Like snowflakes, no two are alike. Some groups work together for a while, and disband when its members have maximized use of the program’s offerings and move on. Others don’t change membership very often, but regularly meet with the same business owners for years. Each is unique in its focus – whether they meet to network, study MicroCredit-NH’s Tutorials, apply for loans, learn from professional guest speakers, or plan a mix of these activities.

“The sustainability and composition of a group are difficult to predict,” said Jennifer Murphy, MicroCredit-NH’s South East Regional Manager. “But the ‘Empowered Entrepreneurs’ Business Group in Dover is currently in its sixth year of existence, and has grown and changed with the continued leadership of some of its founding members.”

Annemarie Lemoyne and Cynthia Smith are two of the original members of the group that have been instrumental to its longevity. Annemarie, the group’s Chairperson, owns *Small Paws Pet Care* in Dover, and is currently writing a book on how to care for sugar gliders. Cynthia runs *Wigglebottom Snax* in Newmarket, and serves as the group’s Treasurer. Even after six years of group membership, the pair continue to find value for the development of their businesses.

“I love leading an enthusiastic group – I feel so energized when I leave the meetings,” Annemarie said. “Being part of this group helps me feel accountable, but also very supported and encouraged. It is a huge learning process.”

For Wendy Walter and Dan Bishop, the demands of their businesses have overtaken their ability to attend meetings regularly. As a result, they have become associate members. Wendy sells her pottery through her business, *Voice of Clay*, and has clients along the Eastern seaboard and overseas. Dan, co-founder of the group with Annemarie, installs roof gutters through his company, *Nature’sWay Gutter Systems*, and books work several months out. Both received MicroCredit-NH loans from their group to expand their businesses. Wendy recently received a loan from a bank.

Empowered Entrepreneurs has added several new members to its roster and is virtually forming anew. The group meets monthly at the family-style Strafford Farms Restaurant in Dover. The new members have energized the group with their thirst for exchanging experiences, ideas and new skills. They include Gail Cameron, who is working on opening a used vacuum cleaner store; Tom Moses, owner of *Blue Star Herbs*; Marirose Walker, a “doula” (a person who provides support and education to women with newborns); and Ken and Roxie Zwicker, co-owners of *New England Curiosities Walking Tours*, which offers haunted tours of pubs, lighthouses and graveyards in Portsmouth.

As in many groups, members are at different stages of business. Annemarie encourages the group to identify monthly goals for each member, which they report on at the following meeting. They are given the chance to receive feedback and ideas from each other. Next steps



Empowered Entrepreneurs!

are then discussed and new goals are projected for the upcoming month. Annemarie is looking forward to planning the group’s meetings for the New Year, which will include a renewed focus on business plans and MicroCredit-NH tutorials.

What do the new members think of joining a Business Group with a long history? “I love it!” Marirose exclaimed. “It is incredibly supportive and I’ve had so many educational opportunities already through the immediate feedback and brainstorming that goes on. The energy is fantastic.”

With such enthusiastic membership and dedicated leaders, Empowered Entrepreneurs is looking forward to a long future. Keep watching for more successful business owners to emerge from this group... *

To learn more about Empowered Entrepreneurs and how to become a member, contact Jennifer Murphy at (603) 496-0520 or jmurphy@microcreditnh.org.

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