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SCORE Cincinnati aims to attract more women and minorities as clients and mentors

Organization helps small businesses launch, grow

BY: Lucy May (<mailto:lucy.may@wcpo.com>)

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CINCINNATI — It's been roughly three years since Judi LoPresti first started working with her SCORE Cincinnati mentor, and she still keeps in touch with him on a monthly basis.

LoPresti sends Carlin Stamm revenue figures for Spun Bicycles in Northside (<http://www.wcpo.com/money/local-business-news/spun-bicycles-northside-bike-shop-succeeding-with-laid-back-vibe-focus-on-fun>) and routinely asks for his advice — even on stuff that has nothing to do with the shop she and her husband, Dominic, opened in February 2013.

Still, LoPresti can't help but feel it might have been helpful to have a businesswoman on her team of advisers assembled by SCORE Cincinnati (<https://greatercincinnati.score.org/node/349580>), a volunteer organization of the Small Business Administration. Its mentors advise small business owners and new entrepreneurs.

"I got lucky with Carlin," LoPresti said. "When you sit down and you're starting a new business, and you're sitting down with these older men who are well off and have done very well for themselves, you really want to connect with somebody that you trust. It would be cool if there were more women, definitely."

That's what Betsy Newman thinks, too.

Newman is executive director of SCORE Cincinnati, a job she has had for a little more than a year. And one of her primary goals is to recruit more women and minority business people to work as SCORE mentors and to recruit more women and minority business owners to take advantage of the services SCORE has to offer.

founded back in 1964."

These days, 58 percent of SCORE Cincinnati's clients are women, Newman said, and 39 percent are minorities.

"Wouldn't it be nice if when the clients came to us, they saw a mentor across the table that looked like them?" she said.

Here in the Tri-State, there have never been more women and minority businesspeople with the expertise to become SCORE mentors, she said. Most SCORE mentors are retired businesspeople, but about 20 percent are established owners of mature businesses who make the time to give back and volunteer for the organization.

All of SCORE's business mentoring is free and confidential. There is email mentoring available, too, although Newman said mentors like to meet in person with clients at least once to make a face-to-face connection. SCORE also has a library of information and tips for business owners, and it provides free business forms online. And the organization offers seminars — some free and some that cost a fee of \$50 or so. SCORE has chapters across the country and is supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Locally, SCORE Cincinnati's 90 active mentors come from all kinds of industries, Newman said. That means no matter what kind of business someone wants to start or grow, SCORE probably has a mentor with experience who can offer helpful advice, she said.

"Nobody is too small or too amateur for SCORE to be interested in," Newman said.

Even so, SCORE mentors make it clear if they think a business won't work or a client should modify his or her business plan.

"We like to say we're not the dream destroyers. We are the reality checkers," she said. "We will ask questions leading the person to determine whether this is right and whether it's the right time to start a business."

All that guidance was a huge help for Gina Pinto Williams.

Her SCORE mentor, Dennis Murphy, gave her invaluable advice and always stayed interested in her business.

Gina Pinto Williams with her SCORE mentor, Dennis Murphy.

"He helped me so much," said Williams, an immigrant from Peru. "He was like a motor behind me, pushing me to do things to grow."

Murphy died in July, but he continued to text Williams even when he was in hospice, she said

Williams said she can't imagine having a better mentor but said it would be nice to have more women and minority mentors available.

The most important thing, though, is getting a SCORE mentor who truly cares about the business and helping it grow, she said.

"They're so dedicated," she said. "I not only had a mentor, he was like a friend."

For more information about SCORE Cincinnati or to become a client or a mentor, go to <https://greatercincinnati.score.org> (https://greatercincinnati.score.org). SCORE responds to emails from potential clients within 48 hours.

Betsy Newman has been executive director of SCORE Cincinnati for about a year.

Lucy May writes about the people, places and issues that define our region – to celebrate what makes the Tri-State great and also shine a spotlight on issues we need to address. She has been writing about women- and minority-owned businesses in Greater Cincinnati for more than 17 years. To read more stories by Lucy, go to www.wcpo.com/may (http://www.wcpo.com/may). To reach her, email lucy.may@wcpo.com (mailto:lucy.may@wcpo.com). Follow her on Twitter @LucyMayCincy.

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