Small Businesses Make a Big Impact

Even if you aren’t a small business owner, you probably know the impact of small businesses in your community. More than half of Americans either own or work for a small business!

May is an exciting month for SCORE since we celebrate Small Business Month. As a part of my volunteering for SCORE, this past week I had the privilege of witnessing small businesses receive special recognition in several states. I will share with you two interesting examples (one from South Dakota and one from Southeast Minnesota).

My first example is a small business that received the 2017 South Dakota Small Business Exporter of the Year award at the Small Business Week event in Sioux Falls, SD.

Nestled between the small town of Letcher and the city of Mitchell is a South Dakota business gem that is giving the world a taste of years gone by. Motivated by a love of history and a desire to preserve our heritage, Doug Hansen, a Master Craftsmen & Historian, founded Hansen Wheel & Wagon Shop in 1978. Hansen and his team take pride in resurrecting, preserving and passing on America's transportation legacy for future generations to enjoy. Everything is custom built at Hansen's with fifty percent of their work done as restoration and the other fifty percent replication.

Chances are you have seen Hansen wagons and coaches if you've visited a Disney theme park or Knott's Berry Farm. The company keeps Budweiser's fleet of vintage wagons rolling and maintains the iconic stagecoaches from the Butterfield Stage Line used by Wells Fargo. Macy's also uses Hansen sleighs in their holiday displays.

Odds are that if a public figure or magnate owns a ranch or resort property (think Ted Turner), there's a wagon Doug has worked on. But western aficionados and
Hollywood productions are not Doug's only clients. His wagons are fit for a future king and queen! William and Catherine, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, rode a Hansen wagon during their visit to the Calgary stampede in Canada.

Hansen Wheel and Wagon Shop is a ranch shop on the prairie winning praise and respect around the world. This unique business has had exporting success sending its iconic American transportation creations to faraway places in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Some of the countries the company exports to include Mexico, France, Germany, South Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

My second example is Watson Recycling, with locations in Rochester, Oronoco and Austin. They were honored by receiving the 2017 Minnesota's Family-Owned Small Business of the Year award at the Small Business Week event in Minneapolis.

Currently eight family members hold leadership roles in the company. This past year they recycled 51 million pounds of material that would have otherwise gone to the landfill.

Watson Recycling, LLC was founded in 1980 by Rodney Watson, who picked up glass bottles and other materials such as paper, tin, and aluminum from local bars and restaurants, sorting and crushing them. In the mid 1990's, Glen Watson, Rodney's son, purchased the business and became one of the pioneers of curbside recycling in Olmsted County.

Gross sales remained in the six figures until 2005 when Glen's sons brought new ideas to the business and increased both profitability and volume. In doing this, space became limited and gross sales reached the multiple million -mark by 2008. In 2011, with determination, knowledge and foresight Watson took a leap, purchasing 12 acres in Oronoco and renovating 25,000 square-
feet of warehouse space. In 2015, Watson expanded again, with the purchase of an auto salvage business in Austin, allowing for resale parts and additional recyclable materials.

This year, Watson will recycle over 55 million pounds of metal, sell thousands of auto parts, own 11 trucks, place over 250 commercial and industrial containers, operate three locations with 37 acres and employ 26 individuals, including eight family members.

I and my SCORE mentor colleagues are so proud to be working with small businesses because they make a big impact in our communities and our nation.

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