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Following big win, Pet Treat Bakery overcomes hurdles, branches out

Learning that her organization, Pet Treat Bakery, had won \$15,000 in grant funding and eight hours of consulting services in last year's Social Enterprise Heroes, Susan Bunn was brought to tears of appreciation.

Though the journey since has not been without its challenges, the Vancouver Island social enterprise is now in a strong position to realize its 2017 goals. Its achievements to date are also resulting in exciting spin-off activities.

Pet Treat Bakery, which is operated by the non-profit Beaufort Association, makes and sells wholesale baked and dehydrated pet treats. It creates social impact by providing employment to adults who have an intellectual disability. Revenues are returned to the association to support its services to the same population.

When the social enterprise entered Social Enterprise Heroes, it was facing some significant decisions around expansion. It was already finding it hard to keep up with customer demands and saw potential for additional equipment to help increase productivity.

With the grant award, the social enterprise was able to purchase equipment at rock bottom price, jumping its production capacity by 150 per cent.

Though working out all the electrical and plumbing upgrades required for the new equipment proved far more arduous — and lengthy to complete — than Susan had ever imagined, nearly 10 months later the new equipment is slated to be up and running soon.

Pet Treat Bakery has also faced challenges around accessing a raw product required for one its best-selling treats. But because Susan had discussed future challenges of this kind with the Social Enterprise Heroes coaches, she already had a plan in place for dealing with this issue.

"We knew we had to find a substitute product with similar benefit. We moved forward and have been test marketing this new product with our regular customers and are receiving a positive response," she says.

All told, despite all the challenges, Pet Treat Bakery managed to increase its sales in 2014. It was also able to hire two workers to manage its supply-chain and customer deliveries as well as conduct plant janitorial duties. And it's added two new retailers.

A high point for Susan over this past year was the annual Christmas luncheon for the 20 employees at a local restaurant. When it came time to pay the tab she was told it had been taken care of by an anonymous person who appreciated what Pet Treat Bakery is doing and "wanted us to keep up the good work."

Looking ahead, Pet Treat Bakery has a marketing plan in place to acquire additional customers and will begin implementation within the next month.

"Steady controlled growth and development of additional products will assure we meet our 2017 goals," Susan says.

But that's not all there is to the story.

With Pet Treat Bakery's success as a legitimate business and not simply another program or project, the Beaufort Association team has gained the confidence and know-how to launch another small business. Some profits from Pet Treat Bakery will be used as seed money to purchase supplies and equipment for the launch of LitterBusters. This business will also provide jobs for people who live with a developmental disability.

The association is also working with a consultant to devise a strategic plan that has more emphasis on social enterprise development.

"Social enterprise is now viewed as a legitimate revenue stream for our organization, one that will lessen our dependence on diminishing government funding and allow more autonomy in providing services in our community," Susan says.

As for her own work going forward, Susan will be relinquishing her hands-on relationship with Pet Treat Bakery to a full-time, dedicated manager. This will give her time and energy to pursue the development of a self-employment incubator to support people who see self-employment as a viable option.

Social Enterprise Heroes 2015 is slated for May 27. To learn more, click [here](#).

Writer: Michelle Strutzenberger



The Pet Treat Bakery product.



The new Pet Treat Bakery equipment.



Celebrate Social Enterprise With Us...

May 27, 2015

The York Theater Doors: 5:30pm
639 Commercial Drive, Vancouver

www.socialenterpriseheroes.ca



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