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## Moraga's small businesses utilize the talents of Saint Mary's College

By Vera Kochan

Saint Mary's College ChangeMakers has partnered with The Moraga Chamber of Commerce to present the first, and hopefully annual, Small Business Catalyst Program.



The event, held April 17 at the SMC campus, utilized members of the Graduate School of Business to help local businesses with 15 or less employees solve various challenging issues that may arise within the course of daily operations.

SMC undergraduates, grad students, faculty and alumni were called upon to provide their input and expertise in a roundtable format with six individual business owners who had, prior to the event, provided the consulting team with pertinent background information and expectations. Through discussions and a diagnosis, a game plan was formulated to help the business owner address and overcome any success-hindering issues.

Consulting teams hard at work offering small business solutions. Photo Vera Kochan

Areas of possible troubleshooting were: financial, accounting support and analytics for sound decision making; business development challenges; marketing with media and social media; computer and online support; conversion of online business or home-based businesses to brick and mortar; competitive market research; organizational and structural management and; international growth opportunities.

SMC Director of Marketing and Outreach for Graduate Business Programs Bill Flitter stated, "I was initially worried - it being our first time - but I'm very pleased with how things turned out." Flitter co-organized and acted as Master of Ceremonies.

The "speed consulting" event was considered a win-win for everybody involved. Participating businesses received free and invaluable consultations from individuals who are familiar with Moraga, and students gained insight into the workings and day-to-day issues that arise for a small business owner.

Moraga Chamber President Bob Fritzky said, "We feel really excited about this. SMC's provost wants to do more tangible programs with the town."

Another organizer and business participant, Chamber Board Member Mark Hoogs, recently brought his franchise of State Farm Insurance to Moraga. "The Chamber does a lot of this type of thing for its members and folks don't know about it." Hoogs wanted to give additional credit to SMC's Interim Dean in the School of Economics and Business Administration Yung Jae Lee for his help and support of the project.

Mixify Polish Owner and Chief Artisan Amy Schofield stated, "This opportunity is amazing! It's great to see the group so on-the-money with me. They're helping me to re-brand while clearing out my current inventory and maintaining brand integrity." Her company helps clients create their own signature nail polish color.

Bay Area Ballplayers owner Steve Hammond recently opened his facility geared toward providing athletes with professional technique and guidance. His business challenges included advice in expansion within the company's operations, process improvement and resource allocation decisions. Hammond's consultation was awesome, he said. "It was great to have this experience one-on-one to address my specific problems."

Grateful Gatherings co-founder Chris Flitter, along with co-founder Donna Somerville, whose nonprofit provides furniture and home accessories for people transitioning from homelessness, needed a growth plan business strategy. "This has been amazing! We have a lot of great ideas, and we'll need to implement them. We're walking away with incredible ideas that don't feel overwhelming and a task list that can be broken into quarters."

Keith Katzman, owner of Keith Katzman Real Estate, was instructed to revamp previously inherited information from former owners of the firm he purchased. Said Katzman, "They pointed out a lot of key places where there was incorrect information. I need to start from scratch."

Student undergrad Aly Henry, majoring in business analytics and economics, was thrilled about the experience she received. "I had a lot of fun applying what we learned in accounting classes. I'm excited to work with and help these businesses. That's the field I want to get into."

Carly Turner, besides being a shooting guard on the SMC women's basketball team, is a grad student earning her MBA. "This is one of the first things I've been exposed to from a small business standpoint. This experience has got me thinking about maybe getting into consulting."

All participants were asked to fill out an assessment survey following the four-hour consultation program. There was no requirement to stay in touch, however; if any owner needed follow-up support, team members could continue to remain accessible.

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[back](#)

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