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By [Kim Billings](#)
UNH News Bureau
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DURHAM, N.H. -- The best anyone can say about the business climate right now is that it is uncertain. But rising unemployment, shaky consumer confidence and the aftermath of September's tragedy don't have to spell disaster for many small businesses, says Mary Collins, state director for the New Hampshire Small Business Development Center.

"It's time for businesses to take stock of their current health, adjust what they can and create a proactive plan to address the uncertainty ahead," she says. "The NH SBDC can help. It's what we do, in good times and in not so good times: we analyze a business's situation and make recommendations for improvement. "

Since its inception, the 17-year-old NH SBDC has worked individually with more than 16,000 businesses and trained owners and managers of another 32,000. Hosted by UNH's Whittemore School of Business and Economic and funded by the SBA and the state, the non-profit organization offers a statewide training program and one-on-one management counseling through six regional offices.

Bob Ebberson, Manchester regional manager, is a former corporate manager and Marine pilot. With 14 years of counseling to his credit, he well remembers the recession of the early 1990s. "Thinking strategically is very important, especially when things get tight," he advises. "Opportunities are always out there. Some of the most successful businesses I know have had to change direction more than once. Being proactive is key. Identify opportunities and go after them."

Warren Daniel, Seacoast regional manager, has experienced business growth and contraction first hand. During the 1980s, he started and owned five bagel shops throughout New Hampshire. "Knowing your market and its cycle is essential," he notes. When we started, we were the first ones selling bagels. Authentic New York recipe, of course. We grew like crazy, even during the recession. But after a while a lot of competition came in. We eventually chose to downsize to one store. We could have retooled, offered something new, but it was the right decision for us. But you can't make decisions without information."

Businesses access NH SBDC services by appointment at one of the regional offices. A typical session involves a confidential discussion of the business, issues of concern and a review of financial information. Clients receive advice about strategic direction, capital, financial management, marketing advice -- whatever is needed. The relationship lasts as long as the client desires: some visit once, others maintain the relationship for years. NH SBDC counselors also make appropriate referrals to other business assistance programs, especially lenders. Information-sharing also is a large part of the counseling relationship.

Elizabeth Ward, the organization's research director as well as North Country regional manager, says, "We do limited research for clients, and we also provide quality reference and industry-specific materials. Sometimes one key piece of information can help a client evaluate a course of action."

"Small businesses are the underpinning of our state's economy," Collins says. "In the face of corporate layoffs, it is more important than ever to keep them healthy."

To contact the NH SBDC, call the Durham office at 862-2200, or visit the web site at www.nhsbdc.org.

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