

Local student receive awards from USB

Two students of the Small Business Academy (SBA) Development Programme offered by the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) have received awards for their small businesses.



Gail Small receiving her award from Prof Wim Gevers (USB Associate Director)

Gail Small, owner of Angel's Steel Fabrication, a small business in Mitchell's Plain, is the top student of the Small Business Academy (SBA) Development Programme offered by the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB). Reyaan Salie received the award for the most dedicated student. He is the owner of Salie's Hiring in Mitchell's Plain

This was announced at a certificate ceremony in Cape Town last week.

Small and Salie are two of the 19 owners of small businesses in Mitchell's Plain and Khayelitsha to complete the programme at USB aimed at advancing the sustainability of small businesses operating in townships by fuelling their growth and potential for job creation.

More than half of the participants were female in the first year that this sponsored programme included Mitchell's Plain.

Small received the highest mark overall. Running her steel manufacturing business in a very male dominated environment has taught this mother of two just how imperative it is to focus on one's goals if you want to succeed. She attended a number of technical courses to understand the industry and acquire the skills needed to do the work. Now she herself trains her team of five staff members, does the assessments and installs automated garage doors and electronic gates, surprising more than a few men in the industry and on site.

"I realised that I had to know every aspect of the business, also on the technical and manufacturing side, if I wanted to produce exceptional products. I believe as the owner you yourself must be able to do the work your business is producing. If you want to be successful, you have to be completely hands-on, especially in my kind of business. I am the only women among about 20 men who work in this sector of the steel industry. As a woman it is really hard to be taken seriously by potential customers, so I had to make them realise that I know as much, if not more, than they do."

Small started the business in 2009 with her husband who had previously worked in the steel industry after being retrenched from her accounts and administration position at a clothing manufacturer. For the past two years she has been running the business on her own as her husband had to accept a permanent position to help support the family and business financially.

"It hasn't been easy. There have been many challenges over the years which I've had to overcome. Especially when you are running short of money it is difficult to stay motivated. But I am incredibly proud that we have been able to remain true to our vision of owning our own company and making a success of it."

Although she had over time acquired the necessary technical skills, she felt she did not know enough about managing and marketing a business. This led to her decision to sign-up for the SBA course. "Our business has benefited enormously from what I've learnt during the course. I developed a proper business plan and strategy, and because I now understand our target market and how to sell our services, I have been able to substantially grow our customer base. In short, my involvement in the course has revolutionized the way I run my business, also from a financial perspective."

The intensive nine-month programme provides business education to owners of small township enterprises. Funded in the main by the Distell Foundation and ABSA, the programme offers workshops and lectures in financial and business management, in labour legislation and HR issues, marketing, customer service and the use of social media. Each participant is matched with an alumnus of USB an approach which has proved to be one of the most valuable benefits of the programme.

Keynote speaker Melanie Burke, director of the Greater Tygerberg Partnership, said: "In the modern, highly competitive world we live in, the important sources of wealth and economic development are knowledge, learning and innovation. All three reside in people." Supporting small business owners through an initiative such as the SBA is about more than just developing businesses. "We don't develop businesses," she said. "We develop people who are business owners."

Burke, herself a well-known business personality, encouraged the SBA participants to continue learning now that they have completed the programme. It was also important to innovate what they already know, she emphasised. Her advice to the participants included that they should keep their word as business owners; meet the standards they have set for themselves; to focus on what they are doing; to choose business associates wisely; and to protect their reputations and the reputations of their business brands.

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