



Lots Of Opportunities For Small Businesses

By Helen Marshall

Small businesses have been characterized as the backbone of our local economy. They are also the lifeblood that nourishes and supports economic growth across the country.

Government and the private sector, along with our educational institutions, recognize the great value of small businesses and, therefore, must maximize the support these companies need to navigate through the troubled waters caused by the current national economic downturn.

A recently published report found that 45 percent of 27 million U.S. small businesses, which employ 100 or fewer individuals, say that they are currently not profitable.

We have, however, turned a corner. This summer we have seen that new shops are opening on commercial strips, the national unemployment rate is down, job loss has slowed down and federal stimulus dollars are jumpstarting projects.

However, we still need to work together to restore confidence and growth as we wait for recovery to lead to improvement in business. That's why over the past six months my office has created several initiatives to assist small businesses and their owners.

In April, I created an Economic Assistance Plan for businesses in Queens. It involved the compilation of resources for small businesses, upcoming events, workshops and projects and the creation of a monthly Business Assistance Calendar. Just go to my office website at www.queensbp.org and find out more. Click on the Economic Development section. The overall goal, as you will see on the web site, is to attract and retain the jobs we already have by providing information to existing and potential businesses. We also want to work with neighborhood business and merchants' organizations, Business Improvement Districts and Local Development Corporations to plan for

growth and expansion. Right now, you will also find more than a dozen organizations that can provide assistance and counseling for small businesses on the website.

Working with the Queens Chamber of Commerce, we also want to maximize links between small businesses and big events, such as the U.S. Open tennis tournament this September in Queens. While visitors from around the world come to Queens to see professional tennis, they also need to discover local restaurants, apparel and other retail outlets that can enhance their memories of their visit. After all, if we are America's most diverse county, it makes sense that we must have a world-class business community that can satisfy the gastronomical and other practical needs of visitors from around the world.

Keep It In Queens, a joint initiative of my office, the City of New York and the Queens Chamber was created to hook up Queens-based businesses to economic development projects here in Queens. The redevelopment of Willets Point is a major, \$4 billion project that will generate 18,000 construction jobs. Small businesses can play a vital role here, by helping to supply the project with everything from lunch for workers to lumber for building and the glass that will allow businesses and residential occupants to look out and see the



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future. Visit the Keep It In Queens website at www.keepinginqueens.com and make sure that you fill out a vendor registration form to become a member of our business directory.

Another partner in helping small businesses is the City Council, under the leadership of Speaker Christine Quinn, who recently announced several proposals to help small businesses and created a Regulatory Review Panel to look at unnecessary or outdated rules and regulations that slow down business activity.

And, in March, my Queens Borough Board asked the city to continue more than \$440,000 in funding for small businesses and job develop-

ment. Creativity and aggressive outreach must also be a part of the mix. Indeed, the Queens Chamber is to be commended for recent outreach efforts to the Korean business community. Those efforts include the hosting of a "Legislative Meet and Greet," planned for October 13. It will link concerns of business leaders in the community with lawmakers. And, organizations like the Guyanese-American Business & Professional Council will continue to forge links and increase opportunities through events like September's Resources for Small Business information session for local businesses.

In the meantime, my office will also continue to work with agencies, like the U.S. Small

Business Administration, the city's Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Small Business Services to sponsor events like last June's workshop that provided a blueprint for small businesses to receive federal stimulus dollars. And, workshops like "How to Run a Green Business," held earlier this year at Borough Hall will reap future dividends.

And, York College Small Business Development Center is assisting small businesses by providing individual counseling and workshops, including Banking and Financing for Contractors on September 30.

At LaGuardia Community College's Small Business Development Center, you can find a multitude of support services on everything from writing business plans to using marketing strategies.

I recently joined with LaGuardia Community College and the Queens Chamber to hold the Queens Finance Expo, an event aimed at building confidence among small businesses that financing opportunities were available at local lenders.

All of these efforts by so many partners have a cumulative effect on business and encourage economic growth. A good example of this occurred earlier this summer when we welcomed back to Queens RCN Business Services, a leading provider of digital and high definition video, high speed internet and voice services. As part of its official opening in renovated offices in Long Island City, RCN invited local business contacts to take advantage of its seminar on tax credits and other best practices on "going green." This is just another way that working together, we help each other.

For more information about my economic development initiatives, you can contact Ms. Melva Miller in my office at (718) 286-2655 or email her at mmiller@queensbp.org.

Helen Marshall is the Queens Borough President.

Council Has Its Eye On Small Businesses

By Christine Quinn



Christine Quinn

On behalf of my colleagues at the City Council, thank you for taking part in one of the many small business events we have hosted over the past several months laying out how the City can help small businesses - and just as importantly, for giving us your feedback on what more we can do to help this important segment of our economy.

Throughout the past several months the Council has made progress in enacting key programs and initiatives to ease burdens on small businesses, including:

- Burdensome Regulations - Under this new law, a Regulatory Review Panel will review the city's various regulations for those

that place an onerous or unfair burden. The panel will work to ensure that regulations are streamlined and small business-friendly. An initial report is due out by the end of this year. You may submit suggestions, questions and concerns to the panel through November 2009.

- Fine Forgiveness Program - Another new development is the creation of a forgiveness period for businesses and individuals with outstanding default judgments on violations returnable to the Environmental Control Board, which make up the vast majority of non-parking fines on businesses. Under this three month penalty forgiveness program that will be in effect from September 15 through December 15 of this year, small businesses and homeowners who have fixed an underly-

ing violation can pay the original fine without paying any accrued penalty fines.

- Financial Assistance for Small Business - Working with the Mayor and New York City Economic Development Corporation, we have expanded the loan program for small businesses. Five million of additional loan money is currently available for small business owners. I encourage you to apply as soon as possible to take advantage of this new funding.

While we have accomplished some of the key goals I laid out in my State of the City address, much more remains to be done. We will need your continued support as we go forward.

Christine Quinn is the Speaker of the New York City Council.