

Small Businesses in Chester Boosted
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Chester Microenterprise wins \$250G grant from the state. It helps entrepreneurs get their business started.

Several blocks inland, away from the big plans to revitalize the city's Delaware River waterfront. Nanette Williams generates economic development with scissors, sprays and gel.

Her two-chair salon, Nett's Designers Touch, has cut, braided and styled the hair of women and men in a busy shopping center in the 2200 block of West Ninth Street since 1991.

Now a week from completing a 13-week course in business basics offered by the Chester Microenterprise Partnership, Williams sees expansion: a bigger salon with a dozen chairs and more staff, offering a menu of services, including manicures, pedicures, facials and massages.

"So you can get it all right here," she said. "That's the plan."

Williams, 39 of the 2800 block of West Sixth Street, credits here new outlook to God and John T. Meli, a Widener University management professor and director of the college's Small Business Institute.

Meli teaches the business course for the Partnership, covering everything from finance to marketing. His instruction "gave me a vision of my real goals in life without working so hard," said Williams, who regularly puts in 16-hour days.

"Hair is very demanding," she said.

Meli's course is one of four programs for entrepreneurs that the non-profit Chester Microenterprise Partnership runs from its office at 23 E. Fifth Street. The affiliate of the Philadelphia Development Partnership also organizes peer lending groups, and sponsors workshops and networking events.

It has served more than 100 businesses in its 18 months, said Leslie Benoliel, executive director of the Philadelphia parent group.

Chester Microenterprise received a boost yesterday from the state Department of Community and Economic Development, which granted the organization \$250,000 under the Weed and Seed program overseen by Lt. Gov. Mark S. Schweiker.

Schweiker singled out Williams for praise in her 15-person class, the partnership's first, during a ceremony downtown at Junior Achievement's Exchange City. Class members in attendance received graduation certification.

The money will fund Chester Microenterprise Partnership's operations for the fiscal year beginning in July and aid in the acquisition of reference materials, said program director, Jim Turner.

Prior to picking up her honor yesterday, Williams worked happily on a woman's twist-up hairdo while three other customers spent lunchtime beneath hair dryers. A T.D. Jakes video, "The Rock for the Thirsty Soul," played in the super air-conditioned shop to create "a more inspirational atmosphere," she said.

Before being recruited for the partnership by staff member Brenda Davis, Williams said she had grown her hair care business "the hard way."

Without knowledge of proper cash flow and personnel management, the Chester High School cosmetology graduate said she had struggled with record-keeping and high turnover in her staff of two part-time stylist assistants.

From the course, which concludes next week, Williams learned, among other things, that good administration "keeps your business going" and that "you have to deal with every individual on their own terms and give them an area where they excel."

Williams said she enjoyed Meli's instruction so much that she plans to take his \$75 course again next time it's offered.