Computer business start-up gets “kick-start” from AERN

When Glen and Cheryl Waldrop attended the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network training session at the Demopolis Chamber of Commerce in April 2002, they were just thinking about starting their own computer service business.

“We attended a seminar a year ago that was very useful,” Glen said. “That’s what kick-started us here. The seminar helped us with the basics for writing a business plan.”

Glen worked as a computer technician for some Marengo County schools for about five years and picked up a few computer repair jobs here and there during off hours for almost a decade. Cheryl is currently finishing a business degree and has worked in accounting and billing departments in the area. In February 2003, the Waldrops went out on their own, opening C & G Waldrop Computers out of their home in Demopolis. Glen is the technician. Cheryl does everything else—bookkeeping, scheduler, office manager.

C & G Waldrop Computers does “anything except Unix and Mac,” according to Glen. The business can build, service, repair and network computers. They construct web servers and provide warranty work. They can provide remote administration capabilities for computers as well as install security systems on computers.

So far, most of their business has come from word of mouth and referrals.

“Right now it’s slow, but we’re making it,” Glen said. “It is honestly better than I expected it to be.” In addition to the individual repair and maintenance jobs, which make up most of their work, they have built a customized computer system for a local construction company and did a web server for a church.

The Waldrops have done some advertising in the local newspaper and are getting ready to do some direct marketing to Marengo County businesses. And with the resources of the AERN, the Waldrops are hoping to grow their business.

Paavo Hanninen, co-director of the AERN and director of the Small Business Development Center at the University of Alabama, has provided invaluable service, according to Cheryl. He has helped them develop business cards and brochures to promote their business. “The biggest positive thing that Paavo did for me is to let me know that I was going in the right direction,” Cheryl said. “I have some experience and ideas, but I didn’t have the confidence to know whether I was going in the right direction.”

Hanninen has helped the Waldrops know how to approach businesses in a professional way with sales letters and brochures. “I’ll work on something and he’ll look it over and let me know how to make...” (continued on page 2)
Watters puts numbers to work for businesses

Annette Watters says she evolved into a demographer. In her current role as co-director of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network she relies on the skills of both her current and previous careers.

After stints teaching and being a librarian, Watters has worked in the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama since 1980 and currently serves as its assistant director. As codirector of AERN, Watters works at education, information collection and distribution, and administration.

The Center for Business and Economic Research tracks trends in population in Alabama and compares those to other states, looking at similarities and differences between states, Watters said. But demographers look at more than just population, gender, and race. They look at income rates, poverty rates, occupational trends, and other socioeconomic topics.

While the Center for Business and Economic Research has been dealing with demographic data for years, the recent connection to AERN attempts to provide a new audience for and increase awareness of the benefits the Center can provide business and industry throughout Alabama.

“Business owners need to know a lot about these socioeconomic things if they want to build or start a business,” Watters said. “We can provide that information. What the Center for Business and Economic Research can contribute to prospective business owners is a realistic understanding of what it takes to start a business,” she said. “Many times people have more enthusiasm than hard factual information when they go to start a business. We want to provide the information necessary to make people successful when they start their business.”

But the information is useful to more than just traditional businesses. “Because of the nature of our partners—chambers of commerce and industrial development boards—we are working in conjunction with these agencies to provide information for a variety of causes from industrial recruitment to grant writing,” Watters said.

Watters and the staff of the Center for Business and Economic Research stand ready to contribute to positive economic growth throughout the state. “In the near term we hope to add two specific counties that have been very proactive to AERN,” Watters said. “In the longer term we would like to expand AERN to as many economically disadvantaged counties in Alabama as possible.”

Watters is excited about the potential in each new AERN site. “Ribbon cuttings at each new AERN site are some of my favorite times,” Watters said. “Everyone is so happy. The University representatives are proud to be in these communities and the local representatives are proud to be expanding their offerings. These are such happy times.”

Through her work with AERN, Watters is one of a team that is endeavoring to provide help and encouragement to business and industry in rural Alabama.

Computer business start-up gets kick-start” from AERN (continued from page 1)
Seven keys to entrepreneurial research help

The business reference librarians at the Angelo Bruno Business Library, University of Alabama, have suggested seven ways for entrepreneurs to use the resources of AERN and the Bruno Library.

1. Obtain a FREE Alabama Virtual Library (AVL) card from your local public library. This will allow access to the business publications within the AVL that are freely available to you by virtue of being an Alabama resident and taxpayer.

2. Check out the AERN website at http://aern.cba.ua.edu for information on how to find guides to the AVL's, Business Source Elite, and more.

3. Use the AVL database, Business Source Elite, for a wide range of articles on an unlimited number of business subjects.

4. Familiarize yourself with the print resources in the reference collection at your local AERN site; turn the pages and explore the business ideas and opportunities. These publications are well organized and easy to learn to use.

5. Be sure to consult demographic guides, for example Sourcebook America, to determine if your business idea may be successful in your community.

6. Consult the AERN list of Business Resources on the Web for reputable and authoritative Internet sites.

7. Be sure to take advantage of the specialists that you have available through the Ask-A-Business-Librarian email option on your AERN website and of course, through the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of Alabama.

Selma workshop teaches local staff research essentials

Faculty and staff from the University of Alabama traveled to Selma on June 4 to present a training session to staff of the Selma and Dallas County Chamber of Commerce.

"I feel that we are better equipped to answer the many questions from the entrepreneurs in our community"

--Claire Twardy, Selma-Dallas County Chamber of Commerce

Paavo Hanninen, co-director of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network, Paul Brothers and Todd Hines, reference librarians at the Bruno Business Library, trained new staff at the Selma and Dallas County Chamber. The goal of the workshop was to train staff about the resources available through the AERN so staff could, in turn, assist local business people in their research.

According to Brothers, in addition to the staff who were present, two prospective entrepreneurs came to use AERN resources during the session. This serendipitous event allowed Brothers and Hines to provide some on-site advice to business researchers.

Claire Twardy, executive director of the Selma and Dallas County Chamber of Commerce, reflected on the session, "I feel that we are better equipped to answer the many questions from the entrepreneurs in our community. We are very enthusiastic about the program and now feel more comfortable in offering help to the community."

L. Ralph Stacy says...

Entrepreneurship has been, and will be, a large and integral part of the missions of Chambers of Commerce as they go about their job of creating and retaining wealth in local business communities. Without the spirit that evolves from these men and women who risk everything to reach for their dreams, our economic system would suffer greatly: not only in financial terms, but in the fact that these "mom and pop" enterprises still form a great part of our business backbone.
The AERN Members and their Contact Persons

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perry County Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>Ms. Diane Harrison</td>
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<td>Marion</td>
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<td>Livingston</td>
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<td>Greene County Industrial Development Board</td>
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<td>Demopolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selma Area Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<td>Selma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission</td>
<td>Ms. Ann Alford or</td>
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<td>Camden</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ms. Robin Crocker</td>
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