WOMENVENTURE

Successful entrepreneurs feted

Mercedes Austin leads a tile-making business. Kristinah Dvorak runs a walk-in child-care business. And Lisa Lounsbury has started an art-therapy business. They were honored Friday at Women Venture’s 24th annual “Women Mean Business” expo in Minneapolis.

Women Venture, a nonprofit SBA-certified business center, teaches, consults and helps finance entrepreneurs.

Austin, a tile artist, quit a waiting job several years ago to go all in on Mercury Mosaics. It is now a 33-employee design-and-manufacturing company that topped $2.2 million in revenue last year.

Austin, 42, took Women Venture’s ScaleUp business development class in 2015.

Dvorak, the “emerging business award winner,” is owner of Hour Kids Walk-In Childcare in Eagan. Between being a mom and a full-time student, Dvorak knew there was a need for flexible, reliable child care in the Twin Cities. Her solution was a center that cares for children on a walk-in basis, with availability by the hour.

Lounsbury was honored as a social entrepreneur. She combined her passion for art and her skill as a therapist to start Art Lab Rx, an art therapy business. She helps clients overcome barriers by taking her 45-foot retrofitted mobile art studio to those who lack transportation.

Forty-year-old Women Venture helped nearly 1,200 women over the last year through classes, loans and consulting services.

NEAL ST. ANTHONY

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

MDI, Medtronic, others form coalition to support hiring workers with disabilities

MDI, the light manufacturer that employs a workforce of nearly 50% people with disabilities, Medtronic and Special Olympics of Minnesota have launched the Unified Work Coalition.

The purpose of the organization — announced during October, which is National Disability Employment Awareness Month — is to advance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

In Minnesota, people with disabilities are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than the general population, according to a 2017 report from the Minnesota State Demographic Center.

MDI, a nonprofit that makes corrugated and custom-plastic packaging and provides environmental services, is a leader in the movement to recognize the vital workplace contributions of people with disabilities and highlight the opportunity for industry to hire more, particularly at a time of worker shortages.

The coalition also includes 3M, Andersen Windows and Doors, the Arc Minnesota, DPI Staffing and Opportunity Partners. They will work on sustainable employment models based on experience, and assist businesses with hiring and support.

Employees with disabilities tend to be dedicated workers, MDI’s experience shows.

Minneapolis-based MDI this year expanded its Northeast facility from 80 to 120 people. Over the past couple of years, it has invested nearly $10 million to upgrade and expand plants, including in Hibbing, Grand Rapids and Cohasset.

MDI employs more than 500. All are paid at least minimum wage, and factory wages can rise to $15 an hour.

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FINANCIAL SERVICES

Debit card is tailor-made for hourly workers

The university is a recent example of a company investing in its own workers. University of Minnesota, 401(k) plans, and the new card is aimed at hourly workers.

The card is designed to align with the needs of hourly workers, who may have varying schedules and income levels. By offering a debit card that allows for more flexibility in managing finances, the university is taking a proactive approach to supporting its employees.

Having a debit card specifically designed for hourly workers can help reduce stress and financial burden. It makes it easier for workers to budget and manage their finances, even with fluctuating income.

By tailoring the card to the needs of hourly workers, the university is demonstrating its commitment to employee well-being and financial security. This type of support can enhance employee satisfaction and retention, benefiting both the employees and the institution as a whole.

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