



University of Buffalo Program Matches 'Proteges' with Successful People.

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By Matt Glynn, The Buffalo News, N.Y. Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News

Dec. 8--Karen Ellington opened her business seven months ago and wants to take it to the "next level."

That is the term that University at Buffalo professor Henry Louis Taylor Jr. uses to describe the goal of a new program aimed at women and minority business owners.

Ellington, a former Common Council member, has applied to participate in the Minority and Women Emerging Entrepreneurs Mentoring Program. It was launched by the Office of Urban Initiatives, UB's Center for Urban Studies, and the management school's Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership.

"You need someone to sit down and find your strengths and your weaknesses to help build the business," Ellington said at her shop near Hertel Avenue.

She hopes to be one of the 10 business owners -- all of whom must be women and/or minorities -- who will be chosen as "proteges." Each will be matched with a successful business owner or executive, and receive advice in confidential, one-on-one meetings over the course of a year. "The single most important pieces and bits of information about growing businesses are not located in books or magazines," said Taylor, director of UB's Center for Urban Studies. "They're inside of the heads of highly successful business leaders."

At the end of the year, each protege is expected to have developed a business plan, or to have revised an existing plan. The protege judged to have shown the greatest improvement will receive a \$1,000 prize at an awards dinner.

Candidates for the free program range from businesses that are relatively new, such as Ellington's, to businesses that have been around for years but haven't moved to a more advanced stage. Participants can be from as far away as Rochester.

While the spectrum of potential proteges is wide, the program has a defined structure. Proteges will be expected to meet with their mentors at least four times during the year, plus attend two meetings for help with their business plans.

At the end of the year, they will present their new or revised plans to a panel of experts.

Taylor said the goal is to help 10 businesses a year over the next 10 years. He said the region lags the national average in women and minority participation in business.

"We believe if we help those 100 businesses move to that next stage of development, they in turn will be reaching out and helping a number of other small businesses," he said.

Keeping the program small allows for it to be tracked closely, and for the proteges to develop camaraderie, Taylor said. The businesses' progress will also be tracked the following year.

"We want to move you from point A to point B, not just to provide you with a set of materials and information, not just to put you through a course and say good luck, and then we're through with you," Taylor said.

Program leaders will also stay in touch with business people who apply to be proteges but are not selected, to direct them to services or support they need.

Citibank has provided \$18,500 in funding to support the program.

To apply for the program, call the Center for Urban Studies at 829-2714, or e-mail: mgt-celbuffalo.edu. Applications are also available at the UB School of Management's Web site.

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