

## Entrepreneur utilizes SBDC advising to design business growth

TWISP, Wash.—It's a truism among small business consultants everywhere that if you want to grow your business beyond the equivalent of subsistence farming, you need to work on your business, not in it.

Jennifer Tate has always done both at her graphic design firm, Earth and Sky Studios in Twisp, Wash., becoming the go-to professional for tourism marketing in multiple formats including print, web and social media.

Tate, a native of the Methow Valley, opened Earth and Sky Studio in 1999, not long after graduating from Western Washington University and returning home. Like many in the valley, she realized if she wanted a good job, she would have to make one for herself.

She ended up making not just a job, but a business that now employs a staff of five and provides design and marketing services to clients across the state and region. Some of Earth and Sky Studio's clients include the Okanogan Tourism Council, Destination Darrington, Chelan Fresh and Sun Mountain Lodge.

Tate first began working with Lew Blakeney, a certified business advisor with the Washington Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Omak, more than 15 years ago. Blakeney's work in Okanogan County is supported by and shares office space with The Economic Alliance.

Tate and Blakeney have worked together

***"That's why SBDC advising is so important...[my advisor] makes sure that I dot my i's and cross my t's."***

Jennifer Tate, Owner  
Earth & Sky Studios

on various aspects of business growth from her early days as a fledgling solo entrepreneur, to her most ambitious step yet.

In February 2016, Tate purchased Cevado Technologies, a real estate website design powerhouse, with about 20 employees.

"I knew I was going to have to change from being a marketing consultant with a small team, to being a leader on a whole new level," she said, and so she has.

Today, Cevado Technologies has nearly doubled its staff, providing good jobs for 20 people in rural Chelan County and it is poised for significant growth over the next five years.

Within months of buying the company she invited Nick McLean, owner of Nick McLean Real Estate Group in Wenatchee, to join her at the helm of Cevado to provide expertise on real estate technology needs and opportunities.

In January 2017, Cevado added a new real estate product, a home evaluation tool, to their portfolio, and in 2018 they are poised to launch a full new suite of products. Tate believes these new products could be a game changer for real estate web tools, not just in Eastern Washington but across the country and abroad.

This wouldn't have happened, Tate said, without Blakeney's assistance through the Washington SBDC.

"I know I wouldn't have bought Cevado without Lew's help," Tate said. "There were so many things that I needed to do and he helped me with every single one. He's just such an incredible resource."

Tate is still in the trenches when she needs



Jennifer Tate, Owner of Earth & Sky Studios  
Photo by Estrella Corrigan

to be, she said, but she tries to keep focused on the business itself—making sure Cevado stays at the forefront of the industry, and that the company is able to attract and retain high-quality employees who can keep pushing the company forward.

Hard work is a given—determination, persistence, tenacity and grit—but even then, things can go wrong. Tate is painfully aware that what you don't know can bite you.

That's why SBDC advising is so important. "Lew is huge help with the technical stuff," she said. "He makes sure that I dot my i's and cross my t's."

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