GTEC ADVISORY GROUP

All for One...
by Camelia Negoita

The days of cutthroat competition among entrepreneurs have passed and the key to succeeding in today’s business environment is collaboration, says Bill Rossi, associate director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Florida.

“By creating an environment where early-stage entrepreneurs can come together and collaborate, you generate economics of shared business services and increase your chances for survival,” said Rossi.

Business incubators like the Technology Enterprise Center of Gainesville/Alachua County (GTEC) provide that collaborative environment through rich mix of benefits including business training programs, assistance with manufacturing processes, help with financial management and much more.

One very valuable benefit is the shared expertise offered by members of GTEC’s Advisory Group. The group meets at GTEC on a regular basis but members are most giving of their time to counsel GTEC’s entrepreneurs. Rossi is a member of the group.

When David Sellers of BummiSteps Design Innovation & Concepts, Inc. wanted to assist his wife with her recovery from a stroke, he wasn’t planning to start a business. Yet, the GTEC resident used this as an inspiration in the creation of the eVO, the first rehabilitative bike that works a patient’s upper and lower body. While the new CEO knew the technology product he was developing would fill a market need, he was first to admit he was no experienced entrepreneur.

Rachel Murdock (ITG Solutions) discusses editable functions to update the GTEC web site with Morris Windhorst. ITG Solutions designed the GTEC web site.

“Bill Rossi and his MBA student helped tune my business plan, and this collaboration enabled me to find a focus for my business and raise money fast,” said David Sellers. Sellers continues to tap into the know-how of the Advisory Group.

“They are very astute and well-rounded business people who are very generous with their guidance and willingness to help others get started,” Sellers added.

The GTEC Advisory Group is made up of community leaders with diverse expertise ranging from legal services to marketing strategies and business plan writing. They serve a dual role at GTEC: an internal one to provide support and recommendations to GTEC management, and an external role to assist and tailor advice to the eight resident businesses.

Although Melissa Raulston had experience in developing hundreds of web sites over the years, what she didn’t have was funding for her newly established company, ITG Solutions. Enter Ernie Moyer, CEO of the Florida Technology Innovation Center and his background in banking.

“Ernie’s creative ideas to raise money and the professional presentation template he gave me helped me tremendously in building my own presentation for ITG Solutions,” Melissa said. “His concrete and specific assistance has been invaluable.”

Product Design Solutions Inc. (PDSI), an engineering firm at GTEC that helps customers succeed through the development of new products and manufacturing methods, has built a long-term relationship with one of its clients through the help of the Advisory Group.

“Group member Erik Sander referred a customer to us and made sure Product Design was the right fit,” said Eric Ferree, Manager and Senior Mechanical Engineer at PDSI.

While many GTEC residents have taken advantage of the valuable resource that is the Advisory Group, members say there’s plenty more savoir faire to go around.

“The extensive network of experts and resources has been underutilized, in fact, and GTEC tenants need to know the support is there for them to use,” said Bruce Brashear, Vice-Chair of the GTEC Advisory Group and Attorney-at-Law with Brashear & Associates, P.L.

He notes that many of the resident businesses have intellectual property that needs protection. Brashear relies on his experience to help design employee contracts and complete the paper work needed when establishing a business. His best piece of advice to any new business: “Get everything in writing.”

Rossi offers one additional key to succeeding in business. “Find a mentor and do everything you can to get the benefit of the experience. Then, when you become successful, become a mentor yourself.”