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WORKSHOPS



When it comes to establishing and growing a small business, there is strength in numbers, as evidenced by a myriad of well-established small business organizations serving the region, including chambers of commerce, merchant associations, and a variety of B2B networking and referral groups — all devoted to helping their members succeed.

Under the category of “You can never get enough of a good thing,” small business owners in Berks and surrounding counties now have another expansive, “resourceful” organization at their disposal dedicated to helping their business grow — the **Small Business Resource Association (SBRA)**. The SBRA was uniquely created to support member small businesses through a variety of hands-on services, employee benefits and cost-effective resources that deliver the right “connections for success,” according to the new organization’s principals **Gary Seibert**, CEO, **Mark Kramer**, Chief Marketing Officer and **Chris Pierson**, Chief Information Officer.

“Every one of us are business owners and operators,” Seibert said. “Collectively, we bring more than 100 years of business experience to the table. We really know where small business owners are coming from with their problems and issues that need to be dealt with. The unique part of this organization is our background experience, but as a member you become a resource for other members as well, so, we are networking people with other members with expertise to address their issues.”

“The SBRA is a membership organization but unlike many organizations out there we’re much more hands on,” adds Mark Kramer. “The SBRA provides connections to help businesses succeed through a wide variety of personalized services and avenues to market your business. We’ve provided our membership with a very unique website, sbrassociation.org, which contains a social media component allowing members to share information and interact directly with each other. There’s nothing else like it out there,” he said. “We also provide the opportunity for our members to record podcasts to



NETWORKING



promote themselves and their businesses to a national audience on iTunes."

The idea for SBRA evolved when Gary Seibert, business consultant and CEO, and his fellow principals realized a common need among many of their clients owning small businesses — a lack of time and resources to help them navigate through day-to-day challenges that are threatening their business success. "So many small businesses struggle because of fundamental mistakes made early on in their business plan," says Seibert. "They are usually very skilled in the type of work they do, but they often lack the background and experience in running a business."

SBRA's mission is "Empowering businesses with the resources necessary to be successful and profitable through loyal, engaged employees with happy, united families," Seibert explains. This starts by providing a variety of business resources such as technology resource help, HR and staffing solutions, business expansion strategies, legal and accounting support and strategic



marketing planning. Then, by offering additional services and benefits to business owners' employees and their families, such as discounts at restaurants and amusement parks, educational classes, college savings programs and more, a balanced foundation is achieved for long-term growth.

"The SBRA takes a balanced, multi-tiered approach to strengthening the foundation of a business by focusing on three fundamental needs of every business: Business Improvement, Employee Development and Family Enrichment," Seibert explains.

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OFFICES



Located at 2395 Lancaster Ave. in Shillington.

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SBRA PRINCIPALS



Gary Seibert, Chief Executive Officer

Gary applies over 50 years of business experience to helping companies increase profitability and achieve their growth potential. He's a master at strategic planning, project management, and company turn-arounds and has successfully founded, built, grown, and sold two multi-million-dollar international enterprises. Gary teaches entrepreneurship and business success at conferences and conventions worldwide; has appeared on numerous TV Shows, CNBC, Turner Cable Network and PM Magazine, and has also authored numerous business management and entrepreneurial articles which have been published in such magazines and newspapers as *People*, *The New York Times*, *Entrepreneur*, *Fitness Management*, *Sports Inc.*, *CBI*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The San Francisco Chronicle* and others. In 1993 and 1994 Gary was a finalist in the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Competition, and in 1994 he won the Berks County Small Business of the Year Award.



Mark Kramer, Chief Marketing Officer

Mark is a results driven marketing and business development professional with a unique blend of expertise in marketing planning, advertising, public relations, social media marketing and sales, overlapping traditional and online marketing solutions to delivering results. As director of marketing for 20 years for a hospitality management company startup, Mark created opportunities for system-wide growth by developing and executing a cohesive marketing plan for both chain restaurants and hotel properties in PA, SC and NC. Currently President of Core1Marketing, Mark provides cost-effective solutions that make a difference in the growth of small businesses in a variety of industries including medical, legal, health, service, insurance, retail and non-profits.



Chris Pierson, Chief Information Officer

Chris brings over 20 years of business and educational experience developing programs and events for youth and adults. In 1995, Chris left the recreation and family entertainment businesses to hone his skills in the computer industry. While working for a fortune 500 company Chris gained valuable experience in web and database development and design. During this time and the years to follow Chris stretched his entrepreneurial muscles in several joint and personal ventures including real estate and event planning, owning the Creative Kids Discovery School and Reading Construction Company, co-owning the Binding Family Heritage (a web based publishing company) and others that gave him great insight to the world of business. For over 15 years Chris has been active in supporting youth development and leadership as a coach for his local High School track team, and as a Boy Scout of America troop adult leader. With a little over 20 years of experience in starting and operating small business companies, Chris now shares his recreational and educational knowledge to help mentor and coach other business owners, executives and entrepreneurs to achieve their dreams.



Laura Seibert, Director of Member Services

Laura adds over 20 years of organizational expertise to our team. Laura worked alongside her husband Gary to create, develop and manage several personally owned businesses, as well as being hired by outside companies to start-up and reorganize existing business offices. Her strengths include office set up, organization and operations, staff hiring and training. She has been involved in a variety of industries including fitness, education, recreation, nonprofit, and medical.

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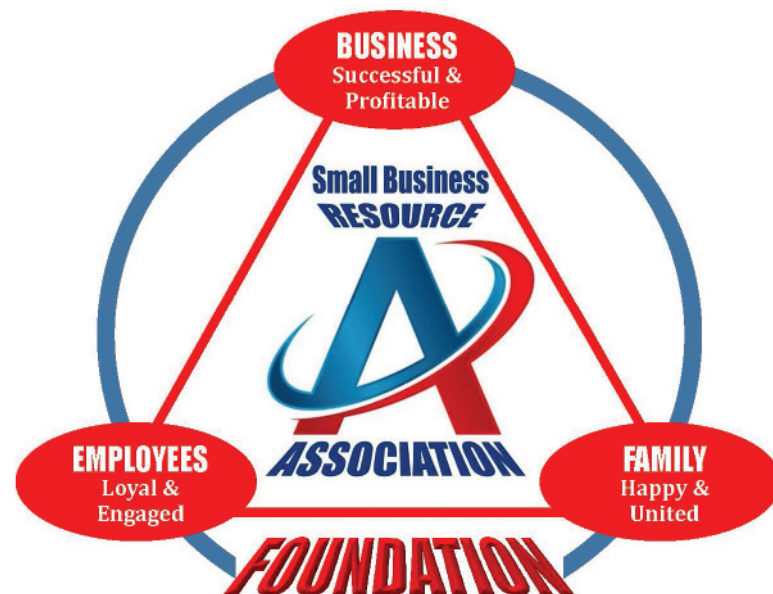
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COVER STORY

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The **Business Improvement** component includes: Full and half-day seminars on topics related to business improvement, business development, growth and success; Training in business finance, law, marketing, development, employee relations and other topics of interest; Workshops — free, 90-minute interactive meetings at the SBRA offices and different member locations; Access to an educational library of print, video, audio and digital materials; and Podcasts allowing SBRA members to reach an audience of local, regional and national entrepreneurs.

SBRA's Business Improvement component also includes a variety of professional services such as: Human Resources Consulting; Marketing Consulting; Legal and Accounting Counseling; Financial Sources; Business Start-Up and Exit Strategy Planning; Insurance Sources and Savings; Business Networking Opportunities; Business Coaching and Mentoring; Culture Development; Business Assessments; "The Pitch"; "The

Huddle"; and Workshop Certifications.

The Pitch is a unique service of the SBRA, designed for someone who is interested in starting a new business or in need of additional capital to expand and grow. The Pitch program will assist the owner in preparing their business plan and presentation. Then, when ready, the owner will have an opportunity to "throw" their PITCH to a small group of bankers and investors to either get one of them to meet and discuss the opportunity or to get constructive comments on steps they will need to take in order to secure an interested lender.

The SBRA Huddle is an hour-long meeting between a business owner and a select team of SBRA business associates chosen with the expertise and experience that can help owners deal with a particular situation or problem facing their business. The ultimate purpose is to help the owner find a possible solution, develop a plan and then help guide them through the process.

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The **Employee Development** component is focused on providing training, skill development and benefits to support member businesses' employees, which will motivate them to be loyal and engaged. Opportunities include: SBRA Member Employee Training; Certifications; Skill Development; Safety Training; Leadership Development Training; and Coaching and Mentoring opportunities. Also, through an initiative called "A Voice," the SBRA will be gathering information from business owners as well as employees that can be used for focus groups to discuss topics that impact the success of all businesses. "Employee satisfaction is essential for every business and there needs to be a place to discuss sensitive topics to reach positive outcomes before they become destructive," Gary Seibert explains.

The **Family Enrichment** component is comprised of numerous resources focused on helping strengthen the employee's family by providing educational programs, enrichment training and other member benefits, including Family Fun Discounts, "Date Night" discounts at member eating establishments, and a variety of discounts on products and services that you purchase and use every day, as well as professional services, including: Financial Management Training; Insurance sources and savings;

College Planning services; Assistance in securing a mortgage and buying a home; and Self-Help resources dedicated to helping families become stronger, closer and happier as they progress through the various stages of life.

One of the most popular and valuable benefits enjoyed by SBRA members is the ability to save on all types of insurance premiums, including property & casualty, home, auto and health insurance, for business owners and their employees. Member businesses of all sizes, even single proprietors, receive a group rate on health insurance allowing for much more affordable premiums than what they could find on the street.

"Another benefit of SBRA membership is its truly innovative website that provides the ability to market your business to every other member business within the Association as well as to businesses and residents in the region," said Mark Kramer. "The site has its own social media component, a wall just like Facebook, which members can use to post videos and message information about your company's events, specials, and discounts to all your member connections," he explains, adding, "The SBRA provides many other excellent opportunities to promote yourself and your business."

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COVER STORY

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We've engaged with Justin Schenck of The Growth Now Movement to record podcasts over the next 52 weeks that are now available on iTunes, titled *The Small Business Resource Show*. We allow our members to record podcasts that provide small business owners with content they need about creating great websites, social media, sales training... the list goes on and on. Our SBRA podcast is all about helping small businesses," he said.

The SBRA also offers weekly workshops, free to members, which provide them with valuable information on how to grow their businesses. Topics included sales techniques for success, leadership development, HR management, social media marketing and how to create and manage marketing and business plans.

Like other B2B organizations, SBRA offers frequent member networking opportunities as well. "Our 120 mingles" (2-hour) networking events have been super successful," Gary Seibert said. "We try to provide something in that event that is fun and entertaining. In some cases, they will actually be educational. You come and you meet all these people. You can go on the website, look them up, 'friend' them, and now you've developed a relationship with that person, and you can create a conversation. This way we are networking this family together and they are helping one another. Its business helping business," he said.

The SBRA philosophy is grounded on the premise that a happy and united family will foster a more loyal and engaged employee, which in turn will help the business be more successful and profitable, which will encourage a good employer to provide more resources to the families of his or her employees. All three are necessary for a well-balanced, successful business.

Above all, SBRA is entirely focused on serving the needs of its members.

"This is our members' association," Gary Seibert emphasizes. "It's not our association. We aren't an association without members. It is our job to listen to the members. We have open ears. We have broad shoulders. We're not perfect, but we will respond in a positive way to suggestions and ideas. We want to be transparent. We encourage our members to bring anything to our attention that we can do better. We want to grow. We want to help people. We firmly believe that if we really service the community well, our organization will grow," he said, adding, "We only do one thing — Help small businesses to be successful. We don't have any other agendas, we're here to serve our membership.

The Small Business Resource Association is accepting new members at its offices at 2395 Lancaster Ave. in Shillington. Sponsorship programs are available for large businesses interested in supporting the small business community. For More Information, please call Gary Seibert at 484.333.3270, email: gseibert@sbrassociation.org; or Mark Kramer at 484.797.4771, email: markk@core1marketing.com, and visit: www.sbrassociation.org.

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