

2019 SUCCESS STORY

BISMARCK



NORTH DAKOTA
SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

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MANDAN BENNIGAN'S

MANDAN – Rob Knoll saw the need for a full-service, family-friendly restaurant in Mandan and took advantage of the opportunity with a franchise. Plans began in the spring of 2017 and Mandan Bennigan's opened its doors for business August 20, 2018.

Challenge/Solution

Knoll had worked in community development for several years and never dreamed of being a restaurant owner. However, he wanted to be able to go out with his family for dinner or have a place to go eat some wings and watch a sporting event, without having to drive over to Bismarck to do it.

When first developing the idea, Knoll shared with Monte Stein, a friend with decades of restaurant business experience.

"It was kind of meant to be," said Knoll. "When I told Monte, he said if he partnered on another restaurant, it would be in the exact area I had in mind."

An off-the-cuff Facebook message to another longtime friend is what led to the choice of Bennigan's franchise. Turns out, the corporate owner grew up with and was classmates with Knoll from grade school all the way through college. He sent a message saying they should bring the franchise to Mandan and that's how this all got started.

Knoll was familiar with the ND SBDC from

the City of Mandan and other partners to seek our assistance. He went with the hope to get some advice and historical information on restaurant development and expenses.

Knoll met with Nancy Krogen-Abel, longtime center director in Bismarck. They began with work on a detailed business plan and worked through several versions of financial projections so they could work with lenders on the best options and programs to use for financing.

"Nancy is very supportive and knowledgeable – it's the first place I knew I needed to go," said Knoll. "I joke that we went through about 55 versions of the pro

forma. One detail would change and it meant everything changed. It got to be kind of a joke between me and Nancy."

"She even questions some of the numbers I provided, thinking they were too low. And she was right. She was very helpful throughout the process."

In the end, the incentive package was put together in partnership with the City of Mandan, Lewis & Clark Development



and the Bank of North Dakota. It included his time with Lewis & Clark Development Group, however he was also advised by

and the Bank of North Dakota. It included a tax rebate of 1% of sales proceeds for

the first 60 months and an interest rate buydown.

“The incentives and buydown were really key in our plans and a foundation for success,” said Knoll.

As with others across the state, their most challenging issue has been labor, but they have the advantage with their location. A portion of the restaurant labor force that fills the jobs across the greater Bismarck-Mandan area lives in Mandan so it was nice for several of them to take jobs closer to home. This Bennigan’s location is the only franchise in Mandan.

“North Dakota has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and attaining and retaining employees and



“We hear every day from happy customers and from people that are so glad to have us in Mandan. It’s been a huge learning curve for me having not been in the (restaurant) business before, but customer service is customer service.”

Knoll recommends other entrepreneurs take advantage of resources like the SBDC.

managers that are dependable and motivated can be very difficult.”

Impact

Mandan Bennigan’s is approaching the one and a half year mark and has gotten great support and feedback from the community.

“Talk to as many organizations similar to what you are developing as possible, but also be sure to work with professionals like the SBDC. We would not have been able to do it without their help.”

