

2020 SUCCESS STORY

FARGO



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ELIJAH HOLDINGS

LISBON, N.D. – July 20th, 2017 is a day that Paul and Teena Elijah will remember for the rest of their lives. It was the day their fourteen-year-old daughter passed away in a tragic accident. It's every parent's worst nightmare to lose a child. After the initial shock of any type of trauma, there are, of course, the various stages of grief that everyone goes through. It was through Teena's journey of grieving that she found an unexpected opportunity to help manage her mental health and give herself a project to focus on..

It all started when Teena stumbled across a 'For Sale' advertisement for the historic Hammelton Building in the City of Lisbon newsletter. Her idea was to renovate this vacant main street brick building built in 1907 to provide a welcoming, functional, and beautiful space for others to enjoy their lives in.

"I knew I would need a project to occupy my mind to manage my mental health, and this seemed like the perfect project," she explained. "This community is the only one Beth would have had a chance to live in and be known. Rebuilding the Hammelton building seemed like the first step to take to give the community a "boost" in the economy and spirit as we

grieved and healed together." With limited knowledge and experience within the world of construction, real estate law, marketing, etc., Teena went to work. During the renovation process, she worked with several other professionals and would seek advice from anyone willing to help. It was then that Gwen Crawford, Lisbon City Auditor, advised Teena

to look to the ND Small Business Development Centers for assistance. "I wanted to be successful, but had no experience with this sort of project," she said. "I didn't have any expectations for my first advising session with the ND SBDC. I didn't know what the process would be like, but I trusted that their team would walk me through it."

Two years and a whole lot of community support later, Teena's mission of creating "buildings that work" was complete. "The whole renovation process was truly a community project. Several youth groups were involved in the demolition and cleanup efforts; I was given advice and



Paul, Beth, Teena, Grace

references from several professionals in the community; I was offered and utilized donated materials. If I had any need, at any time, someone would step in to help. Every person who 'touched' this project made it better," she explained.

Beth didn't only leave behind parents, but a sister as well. Grace Elijah is three years older than Beth, and the two of them shared the bond of being student athletes together. Beth was supposed





to be a freshman the year that Grace was a senior, and they had been looking forward to being teammates. They shared basketball, volleyball, taekwondo, and softball teams. Despite not getting to play high school sports together, Beth and Grace's basketball team proved that a team is more than a group of people who play a sport together, they're a family and a community that comes together in hard times, and the girls' basketball team worked hard to assist with the demo of the Hammelton building. Where Beth shone the brightest, however, was in track, and in an act of true community support and love, the Valley City collegiate track team also spent a month of weekends working on the tear-out of the Hammelton building.

The ND SBDC assisted Teena in planning the financial aspects of her project. Former ND SBDC advisor Justin Nepple and later, Fargo Center Director Paul Smith, developed detailed 3-year monthly financial projections for Teena and banking partner, Bremer Bank of Lisbon. Through her no-cost advising sessions with the SBDC, Teena was able to secure her construction and mortgage loan and completed the building on time and within budget. This gave her prospective tenants a great sense of confidence and excitement to move into the building as they were able to sign their Intent to Lease contracts early. The tenants were



flexible and enthusiastic every step of the way.

"ND SBDC assisted me AND my future tenants (separately) in planning for future financial needs and growth. Together, we had a comprehensive plan that has allowed each of us to succeed. Some of my retailers enjoyed their most profitable quarters DURING the COVID-19 closures and restrictions---this was possible because of the planning and implementation we had done together," Teena explained.

After experiencing such a personally tragic situation, Teena has been able to find some healing through seeing her ideas come to fruition and from knowing that she has made a positive impact on people's lives on behalf of Beth. And Teena shared that her work isn't done. Since the Hammelton building is already



fully occupied with tenants, she has set her sights on her second project in 2022.

The advice Teena leaves to other entrepreneurs is that, "You must be persistent. Stay focused on your intended outcome and know you'll need to be flexible and will be frequently discouraged. Be fast to adjust as the environment and conditions change and be willing to accept help when you need it."

