

2022 SUCCESS STORY

MINOT

NORTH DAKOTA
SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

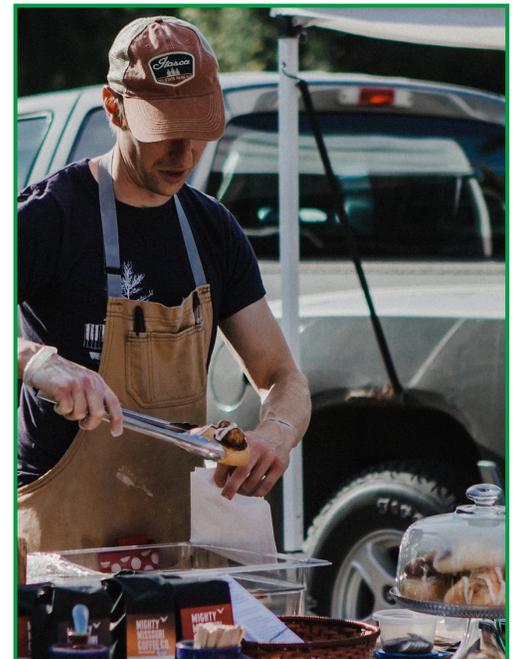
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PRAIRIE SKY BREADS

MINOT, ND --- Travis Gerjets, founder of Prairie Sky Breads, never set out to open a business of his own but the people of Minot, ND and surrounding communities are sure glad he did. It all started at the local Minot Farmers Market back in 2014. Gerjets wanted to make people happy with fresh homemade bread, and that he did. The Minot community supported Prairie Sky Breads so much that they started offering “Bread Subscriptions,” where customers could sign up to have fresh bread delivered weekly. As subscriptions grew, so did his business. Gerjets knew he had to pivot to adjust to the heightened demand. “I first realized

that I was going to start my own business when we started baking year-round. That is when I started to look at the numbers and think about what it might take to make this a business instead of a passion project,” Gerjets stated.

Gerjets set out to learn as much as he could about owning and operating his own business and what it would take to be successful. The determination that fueled the fire driving him came from the people in the Minot community. “It has always been all about the people: the people we bake for, the people I get to work with, the kids who are so excited get a cookie, or the old friends who get together to play dominoes with a cup of coffee. People are dynamic – every day is different, and when you are working with bread and good food, every day is filled with smiles,” he described. In 2018, Prairie Sky Breads started a Kickstarter campaign to help reach their financial goals to open up a brick-and-mortar location.



As every entrepreneur knows, opening up a new business comes with its set of challenges. Gerjets knew almost everything about what it took to bake a perfect loaf of bread but not nearly as much about what it would take to open up his own business. He explained that, “The SBDC was recommended early on by several other local entrepreneurs. They had good things to say, so I thought that I better check it out too!” He reached out looking for assistance with budgeting, cash flow management, payroll, business licensing, and other state and local documentation. He was connected with Mary Beth Votava from the Minot SBDC Regional Center. “Mary Beth worked patiently with me as I put together a business plan, budget, menu... all the things I needed to get going. She was right there to run the numbers with me for projected sales to see if we would need cash flow or if adjustments would need to be made. We talked about rent





in response to COVID-19. All of this has been possible because we have the right people – the BEST people – doing what they do and showcasing their skills and gifts. It is fun – and wild – to watch things grow, change, pivot, and adjust on the fly, day by day.” The citizens of the Minot community keep turning up for Prairie Sky Breads – from opening day, to all the weeks and months thereafter, and through COVID-19, even with the temporary closure of in-store dining – which is why Gerjets and the whole crew at Prairie Sky Breads extend their greatest thanks

had so much to do with Mary Beth and the work of the SBDC. I just don't know how we would have gotten everything done without her.”

“If you are an aspiring entrepreneur, there are bound to be things you don't know – blind spots – the SBDC can help you work through. If you are a small business owner, there are resources and tools available to help you tighten up your business. It is just a great decision to check out your SBDC and see what they can do for you, wherever you are in the process,” Gerjets noted when asked if he would recommend the SBDC to others.

cost, taxes, inventory, utilities -- so many things that could have been overlooked without a pro looking over my shoulder,” he expressed.

After months of planning, Prairie Sky Breads' brick-and-mortar bakery and café opened its doors in February of 2020 – the culmination of a more than 5-year long journey from the first loaf of bread to the opening of its physical business doors. Looking back, we all know what would soon loom over their brand-new business. COVID-19 struck all businesses across the US in March of 2020 and Prairie Sky Breads was no exception. Gerjets explained how his brand new business -- now co-owned with another Minot couple, Zack & Jazmine Schultz -- addressed the pandemic, “I think it is probably impossible to open a new business and not be overwhelmed. Our business has always been relatively limber and agile – from working through the COVID-19 challenges, we have needed to be quick on our feet. We have grown certain aspects of our business like online ordering, curbside pick-up, and delivery



After all of the highs and lows Gerjets has been through with Prairie Sky Breads, he leaves other aspiring entrepreneurs with this piece of advice: “Build your team. From the right staff people to the right lender to the right business advisors – perhaps someone from your local SBDC – the people you surround yourself with are going to help you build and grow your vision. For us, our SBDC was an important part of that team.”

to the community. They love to see their customers walk through their door, a smile on their face, happy to be in this space that they have all built together.

When Gerjets came to the ND SBDC he had no idea of what to expect out of his advising sessions. He came in with a lot of questions and a vision, which is all that he needed. “The finalized business plan – and especially the financial figures, formatted correctly for our local lender –

