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NEW BUSINESS

MINNESOTA



Photography by Paula Keller

Resource Heroes

Special Report

New Entrepreneurs Often Need the Resources of Key Business Professionals to Succeed. New Business Minnesota Brings You Three Stories About **Resource Heroes** You Should Know and How They Helped Clients Reach Their Goals: Larry Greaves, APT Resources; Christine Pigsley, Dakota County Technical College; and Lisa Hendrickson, Call That Girl and LinkedMinnesota.

Resource Heroes

Nobody
Succeeds in Business
Alone, Especially Not New
Businesses. They Often Rely on
Professionals with Specific Skills or
Services They Need to Launch and
Grow Their Enterprises. They Turn
to Their **Resource Heroes:**
Business Professionals Who Have
Made a Significant Difference In
the Success of Their Clients.
Here We Present Three Such
Examples.

Photos by Paula Keller

RESOURCE HERO



Larry Greaves, APT Resources (Center) and clients Jeremy Austrum (Left) and Shawn Kline (Right), owners of Next Generation Auto.

APT Resources

Providing Accounting and Business Advisory Services that Have Helped a Young Auto Service Company Grow and Thrive

New Business Minnesota

You never know the exact moment a business relationship really starts. Was it when Shawn Kline was taking business classes at Dakota County Technical College and Larry Greaves was brought in as a guest speaker? Or was it when Shawn and his partner Jeremy Austrum were ready to start their business and needed a good accountant/business advisor like....Larry, owner of APT Resources?

But it becomes crystal clear you are in a good business relationship when you realize that you have a business professional anticipating your needs, making recommendations that strengthen your business, challenging your thinking and who becomes a part of your team.

Shawn and Jeremy had worked together at a Twin Cities Good-year service center, which is where they became good friends and decided to combine their front office and repair skill to start a business.

But every new business has strengths and weaknesses. The partners knew that they needed someone like Larry, who has helped numerous new ventures get off the ground and become successful.

Larry had started his own accounting, payroll and tax service in 2004 after quitting his job when he realized how much money he was making for his employer and how little his portion was.

He also wanted to deliver the kind of customer service that he himself would like to receive. And to do that he need to be small and keep it very personal.

“My goal was to grow to a size where I have enough to make a living and provide for my clients,” Larry says. “I am a true solo shop by design so that I can maintain my level of quality and service for every client I take on.”

When Shawn and Jeremy first sat down for their initial free consultation with Larry, they were at the earliest stages of planning. They knew they wanted to start a repair business and they had a general location in mind.

“We had some ideas, but didn’t know 100 percent what we needed other than accounting and payroll help,” says Shawn. “Larry helped us out with all of that.”

A critical step was deciding which business entity would best suit their needs. Larry took care of the registration with the Secretary of State’s Office and set up their corporate records book.

APT Resources *Continued from Previous Page*

Just as importantly to Shawn and Jeremy was the time Larry took to explain the entity options for the two partners. “He educated us enough that so that we could decide,” says Shawn. “We went Subchapter-S because it was better for taxes and our finances as a partnership.”

The next major task was creating a strong accounting foundation to provide the owners with the types of financial reports needed to make decisions and know how the business is doing.

Like many of APT Resources clients, Next Generation Auto would be using an industry specific software package for managing all customer information including individual car service history, repair estimating, invoicing and other features needed to control the customer experience.

“Finding that software to take care of the customer well is the first mission. Then I come in to integrate the accounting software,” says Larry. “Can you imagine trying to use accounting software to track repair records for each client? It’s surprising how many try. Sometimes you can just use accounting software, but often times, you really need two software packages.”

Shawn says establishing a good relationship right away was great. “I can ask him anything and I trust his answers.”

Even though Shawn had taken classes on QuickBooks, he decided to go with Sage 50 (formerly Peachtree). “I made the switch on Larry’s advice,” says Shawn. “He refers us to the right people, gives us solid information and he knows what he’s doing.”

APT Resources uses and supports both Sage 50 and QuickBooks and helps clients pick which one best suits their needs.

Larry took the time to learn auto service software so he could understand its reporting capabilities and devise ways to extract critical information for the accounting system. He then trained Shawn and Jeremy on how to transfer the information on their own.

“We wouldn’t have had a clue without Larry’s help. He set up journal entries so I take the information and just plop into Sage 50. No guess work. All right there. Done. And it goes to where it supposed to go.”

Shawn and Jeremy produce a summary of the day from the service software: taxes, revenue, cost of sales, etc. and it then becomes data that is available for financial and management reports.

Most new businesses don’t understand the difference between balance statements and income statement or how to properly use them, says Larry. “Depending on how you look at it, a business can appear profitable. However if it is leveraged with debt and they are deferring payments, they may actually be in serious trouble.

“The sooner you do things correctly, the sooner you understand where you are and the less it will cost in the long run,” says Larry. “That’s why all my clients start with a good foundation and then we make adjustments as we go.”

Larry made regular site visits to Next Generation Auto’s shop in Baldwin, Wis., to work with the partners on the production and analysis of financial statements. “We looked at margins of cost-of-goods-sold along with gross and net profit,” says Larry.

They drilled down in the reports to make sure they were ad-

equately charging for parts and shop time. Some adjustments were needed to affect their net income.

“You need this information if you’re going to manage your bottom line,” says Larry. “There are only three ways to make money: increase prices, decrease costs, or – if profitable – do more volume. How do you know if you’re profitable if you’re not analyzing?”

At one of the on-site visits, Larry trained them on reading the balance sheet and income (profit and loss) statement. “Actually he had to go over it a number of times because it didn’t always stick,” says Shawn. “Now we have the basics on what we need to know.”

Because APT Resources is a solo company, Larry also provides the ongoing software support. Since he did the install, it only takes him a few minutes to solve most of the problems. “I’ve had clients call me while I’m driving and I remember the account numbers as I walk them through the solution.”

Both Shawn and Larry value how the relationship has deepened since Next Generation Auto started in 2011. In the beginning they spent a lot of hours together discussing the plans for the business, talking strategy, concepts and processes.

After the launch, there were a lot of phone calls to Larry for tech support, such as how to key in a transaction. Now that the business is a couple years old, Larry only visits their site twice a year.

As the business has grown, they have continued to rely on Larry for help with the big decisions.

“One of my mottos is ‘As much or as little as required,’” says Larry. “If you have financial restraints or if you want to take on most of it on your own. I’ll play my role.”

Before they hired their first employee – they now have three – their first call was to APT Resources and Larry, who talked to them about unemployment insurance and payroll processing.

And business has been going well enough -- May was a record month – that they are reviewing their balance sheet and income statement with Larry to see if they can expand to a second location, says Shawn. “We know what we want, but we also want to know if we’re out of our minds or if it’s doable,” he says.

Shawn says that his business relationship with APT Resources is similar to the one he has with his customers. “We provide good service and we’re honest people who stand behind what we do. Larry is the same way. I’ve been very happy. He’s our guy.”

And it doesn’t matter that Larry is in Apple Valley and their shop is in Baldwin. “If you find someone good that you trust. Distance doesn’t matter,” says Shawn.

NBM

Larry Greaves is the owner of APT Resources, an accounting, payroll and tax firm that stresses high levels of customer service to meet the need of new and small businesses to better manage and grow their businesses. He can be reached at (952) 423-7413 or lagreaves@gats.com.

Shawn Kline and Jeremy Austrum, owners of Next Generation Auto, which provides quality automotive repair serves at their shop in Baldwin, Wis. The can be reached at (715) 688-2166 or skline@next-generation-auto.com.

Call To Action

Free initial consultation to discuss your business plans and goals call (952) 423-7413 or lagreaves@gats.com

RESOURCE HERO



Lisa Hendrickson, owner Call That Girl, and Christopher Carriero with Guardian Applications LLC.

Call that Girl

Helping a Growing Software Company Successfully Migrate to the Cloud

New Business Minnesota

Lisa Hendrickson is a big believer in business relationships. Her small business tech support company, Call That Girl, has more than 2,500 clients, each one depending on her to keep them running. And she is the owner of LinkedMinnesota, which has more than 29,000 members who are looking for new connections and relationships.

She started her business in 2003 after leaving the corporate IT world where her talents weren't being promoted properly. Call That Girl was created so she could deliver customer and tech support on her terms.

"I didn't want to bring a call center mentality to the help desk," says Lisa. "I wanted to build relationships with my clients, which is what I've done. That builds trust, which brings referrals and keeps things interesting."

As she puts it, she is in a break/fix business. It could be merely

transactional – they call and she fixes – but it generally goes beyond that. Clients call her back for other problems or she suggests better ways of doing things. And the relationships grow from there. She's always looking out for them and staying on top of today's ever changing technology.

Among her specialties is helping companies affordably adopt Microsoft Hosted Exchange and move their servers to the cloud environment with Office 365. Another specialty is being the driving force behind LinkedMinnesota, the largest LinkedIn group in Minnesota.

Enter Guardian Applications LLC, a growing software company that works with large scale businesses to protect their enterprise data from internal intruders. In a nutshell, their software makes sure that HR departments, accounts payable and receivables, benefits, intellectual property and all categories of information that internal staff have access to is protected. No one who isn't authorized will ever see social security numbers, for example.

Call that Girl *Continued from Previous Page*

"I called Lisa because I've seen her for years on LinkedIn as a provider of support," says Christopher Carriero, chief technology officer at Guardian Applications. "Earlier this year we were toying with moving all our file systems and our Microsoft Exchange to the cloud."

The advantage of using Exchange is that all Outlook information can easily synchronize between smartphone, desktop and tablets. If you change your calendar or contact information or send an email, it instantly is available on all your electronics.

With Microsoft Office 365, the entire Office Suite is accessible on line from any device. Since it is cloud based, there is no software to install, is always updated and all files are securely backed up. Files stored there are easily shared.

"People are embracing the cloud," says Lisa. "The cloud will keep you connected to coworkers so you don't need servers on site anymore."

Guardian Applications' servers were all in-house computers. "We actually decided to move to the cloud because of the cost savings," he says. "We don't have to buy, update and maintain servers. It reduced our infrastructure foot print. It changed our real estate needs, giving us more space and reduced our electricity costs for running and cooling the hardware."

Although Guardian Applications is full of talented technical people, Christopher says they turned to Call That Girl because Lisa had the experience in all aspects of Exchange and Office 365.

"Our time is better spent supporting our clients and developing new products," he says. "We're a small company and don't have in-house support staff. We brought Lisa in so we could focus on our core business. We did a lot of DIY stuff when we first started and finally realized our time was better spent with clients."

As with all her clients, Lisa says she did a thorough interview with Christopher to prepare her proposal. She typically looks at the number of employees, desktops, laptops, smartphones and tablets. The analysis also includes how they do their backups, file sharing, security, how they function now and what changes they are anticipating.

"It's important to know if they are planning to move or grow significantly," Lisa says. "If we're looking six months to five years down the road we can identify problems and fix them before they get out of control."

Call That Girl outlined a number of solutions that met Guardian Applications' needs. Christopher said that because they wanted to manage their own file migration to the cloud, they coordinated with Lisa to make sure it was seamless. Guardian turned the Outlook Exchange mailbox migration over to her.

"She took the reins and ran with it," Christopher says. "There was very little to do on our part...It just happened and she got it done."

Lisa says that it's unusual to find the personal service she provides from traditional technical support. At a call center, you get someone at the first level – a novice who can answer the most common questions. They may have to refer you to multiple levels and call back later.

"It's better to have a relationship with someone who knows your equipment, your processes and what your needs are," says Lisa. "I

know my client's systems."

Migrating Microsoft Outlook and clients emails, calendars, contacts and tasks to the cloud isn't as easy as copy and paste. Most people have their Outlook organized to meet their personal needs. Her clients want to see that personal organization make the transition to the new environment so they won't miss a beat.

"I've seen so many setups, I almost instantly get how you are using it," says Lisa. "I know the type. It's how you organize yourself. It's like a personality."

Lisa says it's not uncommon for people to keep thousands of emails. It can become a problem if it makes Outlook slow or sluggish. She has had clients that have hoarded so many emails that they can't open their calendar or they can't find a contact.

It's not enough to fix that problem, she says. "I train them on how to manage it efficiently to avoid the problems. I gently de-hoard for them and move items around so it flows. There is a strategy for managing it."

It can take two to four hour to clean up a client's Outlook. To do it effectively, she asks lots of questions about how the information is organized and how it is used. In the process, she often discovers other problems that need addressing.

"I've found people with years of data that had never been backed up. They thought it was being backed up," Lisa says.

Not all of her clients are as technically savvy as Guardian. When many businesses are starting out they will try and fix problems on their own, hoping to save money. "Generally, it doesn't work," says Lisa. "

"They will spend hours and hours and only make the problems worse. They'll Google their issues and give it a try. They don't know their system well enough to even ask the right question and end up making more work for me."

Having access to someone that was available and knowledgeable is essential to Guardian Applications, says Christopher.

"Lisa will be kept in the loop to make sure we have no down time. As we roll out new products or take on new clients in our new virtual world, it's very important to have Lisa supporting us. It's a very good relationship."

NBM

Lisa Hendrickson is owner of Call That Girl, a technology support company serving businesses with technology needs, computers and cloud application. Current focus is host exchange Microsoft Office 365 and the cloud. She is also the owner of LinkedMinnesota, the largest LinkedIn group in the state. She can be reached at (612) 865-4475 or lisa@callthatgirl.biz. [Linkedin.com/in/callthatgirl](https://www.linkedin.com/in/callthatgirl).

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RESOURCE HEROES



Christine Pigsley, Business and Entrepreneurship Instructor at Dakota County Technical College, and David Hartnett, owner of the Dunn Bros. Coffee Shop in Farmington.

Dakota County Technical College

Preparing a Student Entrepreneur to Grab the Unexpected Opportunity

New Business Minnesota

When graphic designer David Hartnett entered the entrepreneur program at Dakota County Technical College (DCTC), he just wanted to turn his part-time company into a full-time enterprise. Instead, he discovered how to evaluate opportunity and wound up owning a now thriving coffee shop.

It all happened so fast, David recalls. He had been laid off from a marketing company and with the aid of a displaced worker program, thought he would take some classes at DCTC that would help him grow Klug Designs, a side business he had run for a number of years.

"I had the graphic talent on the left side of the brain, but nothing on the business side," David says. He wanted to learn how to market to other entrepreneurs, small businesses and non-profits.

He didn't know what he should charge for his services. He wanted to learn how to run a business, from accounting, customer service, legal, sales to financial bootstrapping.

Working out of his home, David spent a lot of time studying and meeting clients at the Dunn Brothers Coffee Shop near his home in Farmington. Then he found that the store was going to close. The manager asked if he might be interested in taking it over.

"Because of my education at DCTC, I was able to quickly figure out what was wrong with the franchise and how to fix it," says David. "The owners were not active. They owned the surrounding mall and put the coffee shop in to drive traffic and help sell retail space. What was lacking was marketing, which I already knew."

It didn't take him long to put his new business planning skills to use. He figured out how many cups of coffee he'd have to sell to

Dakota County Technical College *Continued from Previous Page*

make it profitable and found he could add beer and wine to cater to non-coffee drinkers. The service was good and the product was great.

“The analysis helped me make a quick decision,” David says, giving credit DCTC as a great resource for new and growing business owners.

It didn't take long to put the deal together. He negotiated with Dunn Bros., met with the president, who came out to the Farmington location to give input, created a solid marketing plan, a business plan with a vision of where he wanted the business to go.

Christine Pigsley, Business & Entrepreneurship Instructor at DCTC, wasn't surprised at David's decision to buy the franchise. “We are teaching students how to be entrepreneurs and how to take on an opportunity when it comes,” she says. “If he had just come for a three-hour class on QuickBooks, he might not have jumped on the opportunity in Farmington.”

Christine was referring to the Business Entrepreneur Program, an 18-credit, two-year certificate that David took. A key component of the program is the fundamentals of business planning. Students often start the class with multiple ideas and they want to find out which one to pursue first. After they write two or three plans at the same time, one emerges that is stronger than the rest.

An important part of the classroom atmosphere is how students, who are often age 30 and beyond, challenge each others' ideas, offer alternatives and serve as sounding boards for each other. It's a very engaging, supportive environment, she says.

Christine says that in addition to classroom training, the campus runs a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in partnership with the Small Business Administration that provides educational services for small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs.

David sought out SBDC counseling for his design business. “I remember him wanting to grow his presence and improve his business by developing a business-to-business marketing plan. We became a good sounding board for him and helped him make connections with the right people on campus and beyond.”

Recognizing the real-world needs of students and graduates like David, DCTC has created a number of opportunities for students and graduates.

One is the Strive Business Growth Center, our virtual incubator for home-based entrepreneurs who often don't want to set up an office.

“They like being home based,” Christine says. “Sometimes they need a more professional presence where they can meet clients. This gives them an opportunity to have the work space on an hourly basis and have a business address at our campus. Their mail comes here. They meet with clients here. They can use our conference room space, copy machines, projectors or other

equipment.”

Many students have day jobs and business family lives, which is why DCTC offers interactive classes online that can be just as rewarding and long term as when they sit together. The key for students is flexibility and an educational format that works best for them.

David was a fairly typical student, says Christine. About one third come in with a specific need: marketing, selling, accounting. They generally take the class and see how it works. Then they come back for more. Some students have the GI Bill or can access federal financial aid to pay for the full curriculum.

Many students who recently started a business just want to take a class on financial management or marketing. Some decide to take a comprehensive class approach to help deal with a problem they are struggling with: Monday night is learning how to sell and Wednesday is how to market.

David said every class he took was intensely practical: “In my business, it's really helped: How to get new customers and how to hire good employees. It's real education. Real results.

“In today's market, you need knowledge that is down and dirty. I've been to college before, but here I need to know something quick. Rather than study about company X and its widget problem, you are actually working on your business as part of the class. There are 20 other students who each have their own business – a bed and breakfast, a restaurant – and you get great feedback.”

David says he would advise any startup to take classes to fill in the areas where they are weak. If not classes, seek out people you admire in your industry that you can talk to or go to seminars. “Starting a business takes work, a lot of decision making and risk taking,” he says. “I don't know where I would be without DCTC.”

Christine says that the college works hard to develop lasting relationships with students. “We may have been a resource hero to David, but he has turned into one for us,” she says.

“He now sits on our entrepreneurship advisory board and is working with us to support other business owners in topical speaker series and other events that support business owners. David is a guest lecturer for a number of classes, volunteers his talent to the school in design, printing and special events.”

NBM

Christine Pigsley is a Business & Entrepreneurship Instructor at Dakota County Technical College and a counselor at its Small Business Development Center. For more information on entrepreneurial course offerings of particular interest to new and small business owners and financial aid questions, she can be reached at (651) 423-8231 or christine.pigsley@dctc.edu. www.dctc.edu.

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For more information on entrepreneur courses to help you manage your business, go to www.dctc.edu or call (651) 423-8231