

# Program sharpens small business skills

By Melanie Brandert  
Staff Reporter

A UNL training program helps Nebraska small business owners sharpen their business skills.

The Fast Trac Entrepreneurial Training Program was designed to teach small business owners how to expand their businesses, develop market strategies or build management teams, said Marilyn Schlake, program coordinator for the Center for Rural Community Revitalization and Development.

"It's for people who want to improve their business," she said. "They can create their own jobs, create other jobs for people or create community growth."

Eleven sites in Nebraska, with additional sites planned, are served by coalitions of local residents. As the program's governing board, each coalition determines which course and curriculum will be offered and chooses a starting date in either September or January.

"It varies as to the makeup of the people in the community and those interested in the economic growth of the community or region," she said.

Local coalitions also can regulate the cost of the program, Schlake said, as long as sufficient funding is available. The suggested fee for the program is \$175.

Schlake said the training program, which initially began in Norfolk, Omaha and Scottsbluff, was funded mostly by a grant from the U.S. West Foundation. Other contributors include the State Fast Trac Coalition, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and the Cooperative Extension Service.

The state coalition office in Filley Hall on East Campus oversees management of the program, sets certification standards for the courses and trains program instructors and coordinators, she said.

Dennis Kahl, extension educa-

tor for Seward County, said the program would soon begin in the Seward area. Small business owners in the area need help planning for the future, Kahl said.

"It provides businesses within the community and the county to have an opportunity to improve, expand, grow or take on new employees," he said.

Kahl said he hoped to enroll 20 to 25 people in the program. Classes, which will be held in Milford, Seward and Utica, are scheduled to start Jan. 8, he said.

The 11-session, weekly program has been successful, Schlake said. A survey of participants indicated that about 80 percent had created full-time jobs after the program.

Results from a follow-up survey indicated 90 percent of participants generated more positions, she said.

Ed Oxford of Sargent enrolled in the Fast Trac program last year and wrote a business plan for his craft business on profits and losses and three- to five-year projections on cash flow to present to his local bank.

"You take into account book-keeping, taxes, EPA regulations, what you need to change, what's making money," he said.

The program also provided a way for Oxford, who attended courses in Broken Bow, to experiment with the latest technology.

The availability of information on the Internet impressed him, Oxford said. His class spent three hours navigating the information superhighway at the University of Nebraska at Kearney library during one of the sessions.

"I think what I was impressed with most was being able to find your market and availability of supplies," he said. "It was awesome to me to know all that information is there."

"I wish I had taken something like this before I started."

# Speaker to critique U.S. media

By Kasey Kerber  
Staff Reporter

Cornelius Alexander, a press officer for New Scotland Yard in London, will address the Nebraska Wesleyan Forum on Friday.

His presentation, "An American BBC? One English View on the News Media," will contrast the news media of the United States with the United Kingdom and the British Broadcasting Corp. It may later air on Omaha public radio station KIOS-FM (91.5).

"He's going to discuss how our media differ from theirs and talk a little bit probably on the way our media get and expect more information in many cases," said Robert Oberst, Wesleyan's political science department chairman.

Oberst met Alexander in Asia and arranged for him to come to Nebraska Wesleyan University.

"When I first spoke to him, one thing that amazed him was the Oklahoma City bombing coverage," Oberst said.

"Compared to the amount of news coverage and exposure there would be in Britain, it was phenomenal."

Alexander also will look at the British broadcasting system and contrast it with the American media.

"The BBC had a monopoly on the media until about 20 years ago," Oberst said. "Even now it continues to be one of the foremost news organizations in the world."

Oberst said one reason the BBC has a world-renowned reputation was its commitment to presenting unbiased news.

"Stories very seldomly include a showing of sentiment," he said. "They just present the facts."

Alexander will speak at 10 a.m. at the Elder Memorial and Speech Center. The forum is free and open to the public.

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