

Free business counseling opens doors for travel startup

Katie Dailey got a boost from a St. Paul nonprofit that now offers its services in Woodbury.

By **TIM HARLOW**, Star Tribune, November 21, 2010



A sticker on the front-door window of Katie Dailey's Woodbury home proudly announces that she is a member of the city's Chamber of Commerce. At her home, she runs a thriving travel agency planning trips for business and leisure travelers to her native China.

It was not long ago that Dailey found herself in the same situation as many Americans: unemployed and looking for work.

With the help of St. Paul SCORE, a nonprofit offering free business counseling, coaching and mentoring, Dailey combined her passion for travel and her homeland and formed Dailey Travel, a company specializing in vacation planning, business consultation and cultural education.

Dailey made a few trips to SCORE's headquarters at 176 N. Snelling Av. to meet with counselors, use its business center and create a business plan. But SCORE, which stands for the Services Corps of Retired Executives, recently brought its services to the R.H. Stafford Library to make it easier for Woodbury and Washington County residents who are considering making the leap from

the corporate world to running their own firms or are simply looking for help to keep their small companies afloat. Counselor Horst Kraft meets with clients, with or without an appointment, from 2:30 to 6 p.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of the month.

One of the reasons SCORE came to Woodbury is "because I live here," joked Kraft, who worked with Dailey to get her travel service up and running. But the real motivation is that "we have a high percentage of clients who are requesting counseling coming from this market."

SCORE St. Paul serves about 1,200 clients a year, Kraft said. So far, at least 15 people have come to the library to meet with Kraft since September, when SCORE began offering free one-on-one sessions in Woodbury, and several others have called to ask about it, said Library manager Chad Lubbers.

"The typical entrepreneur has several ideas, and that is not unusual," said Kraft, a former marketing manager for the defunct Warner Hardware stores in the Twin Cities and the Wicks Corp. in Chicago. "We ask them, 'What do you really want to do?' Then we suggest resources and give recommendations. But we do not run the business. We spend a lot of time planning."

That was what Dailey found most beneficial. After she had spent her entire career working for Fortune 500 companies as a software development engineer and technical leader, she met with Kraft to develop a business plan, get counseling and learn marketing techniques.

Though it's not her favorite part of the job, she learned to make "cold calls" to potential clients from her basement office that features a computer and a desk loaded with books and brochures. She also spreads word about her services through Chinese language and culture courses she teaches at Century College in White Bear Lake and in community education courses in area schools. She also leads sessions for 3M employees who are planning to travel to China on business.

"I didn't have a lot of money to spend, and they have a lot of very good resources, and they're free," Dailey said. "It's nice to have somebody talk with you and encourage you. I'd recommend them to anybody in my shoes."

Kraft, who has been a volunteer SCORE counselor for six years, said his services are not just for business startups. He also meets owners of existing businesses who are looking to grow.

He said, "I enjoy helping with strategy and building success stories."