



February 2026

SMALL BUSINESS CENTER INSIDER



Showing Love to Our Pets This February!

This month, we're proud to highlight *The Photo District Pet Photography*, a local small business bringing creativity and heart to pet photography. Their work showcases the power of passion and community support in building a successful small business. Consider booking a session this Valentines Day, and all month long, to celebrate your pet and support local entrepreneurship.

Our Center is part of a statewide network dedicated to supporting the development and growth of small businesses. Every day, entrepreneurs across our community bring their ideas to life, proving that the spirit of free enterprise is thriving. While the path to business ownership can be challenging, our team is here to provide the resources, guidance, and support you need to turn your vision into success.



What's Inside This Issue

- SBCN Startup Showdown
- Free In-Person and Online Workshops
- Local Small Business Success Story
- Complimentary one-on-one business counseling
- Free NCDOR Tax Classes

“A business starts with an idea; it’s success begins with a plan!”

-Director, Jerry Coleman



SBCN STARTUP SHOWDOWN

POWERED BY WELLS FARGO

Turn your **bold idea** into a business!

Compete for up to \$30,000 in startup funds, plus:

- Online Entrepreneurship Training & Mentorship
- Business-Planning Tools & Professional Pitch Coaching
- Professionally Produced Pitch Video
- Statewide Voting Exposure
- Chance to Launch your Business with Startup Funding & Support

APPLICATIONS OPEN MARCH 1, 2026

Applications Close April 7, 2026
Program/Training begins May 2026
Pitch Day/Showcase in August 2026

Applicants must be 18 years of age, have a new (not yet established) business idea based in North Carolina, be willing to complete a short online course, and complete an application with required materials.

For help, or to get started visit
nccommunitycolleges.edu/sbcnstartupshowdown



FREE SMALL BUSINESS COUNSELING

No matter what stage of your business you're in, just starting out, launching, or preparing to grow, the *CFCC Small Business Center* is here to support you every step of the way. Our Director and Business Counselor, **Jerry Coleman**, offers personalized one-on-one guidance to help you navigate challenges, discover new opportunities, and create a clear path forward. Whether you need support with business planning, marketing strategies, financial direction, or a trusted resource to offer guidance and perspective, Jerry is ready to walk alongside you throughout your entrepreneurial journey. You don't have to do it alone, we're here to help you move forward with confidence.

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Register for
counseling
today at
cfcc.edu/sbc





SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: THE PHOTO DISTRICT

The Photo District is a pet photography business focused on capturing the connection between people and their pets. The owner, Breanna Burge, works with families in studio and other locations to create portraits focused on preserving memories and connection, which are then turned into finished artwork for their homes. Breanna also partners with local shelters and rescues through her businesses *Seen & Save initiative*, photographing adoptable pets to help them stand out and find homes. In 2025, Breanna photographed three hundred and twenty four adoptable pets, and two hundred and thirty nine have since found homes. Many others are still waiting, and new pets enter shelters every day, which is why Breanna is committed to continuing and growing her work.

“The Small Business Center has been an important reminder that building a business doesn’t only happen behind a computer screen. The advice I received encouraged me to get out into the community, participate in networking events with other local businesses, and put my work directly in front of people. That guidance pushed me to attend markets, collaborate locally, and have face-to-face conversations that led to real connections and opportunities.” _____ ,

-Breanna Burge, Owner

Before launching *The Photo District* in 2023, Breanna worked in corporate data analytics and earned degrees in Animal Science, Business, as well as an MBA. She first discovered pet photography while looking for ways to give back to local rescues, and it completely changed her life. Since then, The Photo District has partnered with amazing organizations like *Paws Place*, *Long Road Home*, *Hamilton's Healing Hearts*, *Rescue Connect NC*, *Freedom Bridge*, and *Dauntless Dog Rescue* to photograph adoptable pets and help them find their forever homes. Now, Breanna gets to combine her lifelong love for animals with storytelling through photography, and she couldn't imagine doing anything else.

“One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned is not to accept isolation as part of entrepreneurship. Running a business can feel lonely if you let it. Putting my business into the community, attending networking events, and leaning on support from resources like the Small Business Center has helped me feel more connected and engaged in my work. You don’t have to do everything alone, and some of the most valuable growth comes from showing up and building relationships.”

The Photo District transforms everyday moments into lasting memories. Whether you’re looking for custom artwork for your walls or a timeless keepsake to celebrate your pet, Breanna makes the experience effortless, meaningful, and full of heart. This Valentine’s Day, and throughout the entire month of February, show your pet some extra love.



Free In-Person Seminar

StoryBrand for Business Owners: How to Talk About Your Business So Customers Buy (Lunch & Learn)

February 12th from 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM

CFCC Surf City Campus Alston W. Burke Center at Surf City

If you're a business owner, chances are you're frustrated with marketing that costs money but doesn't deliver results. You know something isn't working, but without a clear strategy, you feel stuck repeating the same efforts while sales lag and momentum stalls. Here's the good news: it doesn't have to be this way.

In this keynote session, Sue Rachunok, owner of Design Interventions and a StoryBrand Certified Guide, shares seven simple, proven marketing principles that help businesses clarify their message, attract the right customers, and grow with confidence.

Speaker(s): Sue Rachunok, Design Interventions

Co-Sponsor(s): The Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce

The Lunch and Learn Series is free to attend.

A boxed lunch is available for purchase by emailing director@topsailchamber.org or by calling 910-329-4446

\$10 Lunch for Chamber Member

\$15 Lunch for Non-Chamber Members

Register online at tinyurl.com/storybrand212

FREE WEBINARS

Plan our Website Like a Pro: Strategies That Save Time and Get Results (Online)

Tuesday, February 10th
from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Legal Structures for the Small Business Owner (Online) SSBCI-TA Program

Friday, February 13th
from 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM

Selling Products on Amazon and Etsy for Your Small Biz (Online)

Thursday, February 19th
from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Introduction to Federal Contracting for the Small Business Owner (Online)

Tuesday, February 24th
from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM

**Scan the QR code
to register for our
free in-person and
virtual workshops.**



INSTRUCTOR INSIGHT

Laurel Rupe leads the Small Business Advisors team at *The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC)*, supporting entrepreneurs as they start and expand small businesses across North Carolina. A longtime Raleigh resident, she is also a mixed media artist who enjoys needlework, painting, and paper arts.



"Small businesses are a big deal in North Carolina and the EDPNC Small Business Advisors and the Small Business Center Network play a vital role in helping them thrive. The Small Business Advisor Team helps entrepreneurs navigate state rules, regulations, and licensing requirements by offering clear, personalized guidance and connecting clients with the right resources to move forward with confidence."

Laurel Rupe

Director of Small Business Advisors

Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC)

If you'd like help cutting through confusing rules and mixed messages, join us for one of the free Starting a Business in North Carolina classes offered through the *Small Business Center Network*. Our goal is simple: to help small businesses across North Carolina succeed.

Starting Your Small Business in North Carolina (Online)

Thursday, February 12th from 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM

UPCOMING EVENTS

Take advantage of our free and low-cost seminars designed to help you start, manage, and grow your business. With sessions offered at convenient times, you can learn about writing a business plan, marketing your products or services, managing finances, and more all created to support your success.

Register for free workshops at cfcc.edu/sbc



LET'S TALK TAXES!

FREE WORKSHOPS WITH NCDOR



The Small Business Center Network (SBCN), in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Revenue (NCDOR), offers a series of free tax workshops designed specifically for small business owners and entrepreneurs like yourself.

These sessions will cover essential topics such as business tax responsibilities, sales and use tax, withholding requirements, and how to stay compliant with state tax laws. Whether you're just getting started or already running a business, these classes provide practical guidance straight from the experts.

Take advantage of this opportunity to ask questions, gain clarity, and feel confident this tax season.

EXPLORE ALL TAX CLASS OFFERINGS TODAY AT
[TINYURL.COM/TAXCLASSES2026](https://tinyurl.com/taxclasses2026)



February

Date	Event	Details
Feb 3 2026	Business Tax Essentials for the Small Business Owner (Online)	Tue, Feb 3 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM Topic: Tax Planning Online Facilitated by SBCN State Office
Feb 4 2026	Individual Income Tax Basics (Online)	Wed, Feb 4 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM Topic: Tax Planning Online Facilitated by SBCN State Office
Feb 5 2026	Spanish Sales and Use Tax Basics (Seminario web sobre impuestos sobre las ventas y uso)	Thu, Feb 5 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM Topic: Tax Planning Online Facilitated by SBCN State Office
Feb 10 2026	Withholding Tax Basics for the Small Business Owner (Online)	Tue, Feb 10 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM Topic: Tax Planning Online Facilitated by SBCN State Office
Feb 11 2026	Federal and State W-4/NC-4 (Online)	Wed, Feb 11 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM Topic: Tax Planning Online Facilitated by SBCN State Office
Feb 12 2026	Labor Issues for the Small Business Owner - Online	Thu, Feb 12 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM Topic: Managing Employees

SMALL BUSINESS CENTER Q&A

Where and how do I get the money to start my business?

Most new small businesses are capitalized by their owner's savings and salaries, loans from family and friends and loans using automobiles, homes, or other assets as collateral. Some entrepreneurs use credit cards to finance the early months of a start-up, but this alternative can be costly and risky. Banks are the traditional source of borrowed funds. Commercial finance companies, venture capital firms, trade credit, cash value of life insurance policies, equipment leasing, and selling stock are additional sources of financing for your venture. The Small Business Administration (SBA) offers a number of financing alternatives but is most well known for its 7A Guarantee Loan. Another great SBA loan product is the Community Express Loan. Lenders will want to know how you will use the loan; how much you want to borrow; and how you will repay the loan. A well-written business plan with projected financial statements can communicate your ideas and needs to potential lenders and investors.



TAKING^{the} LEAP



Apply Now for the SBTDC's Taking the Leap to Kickstart Your Business Venture

Taking the Leap (TTL) is an innovative, no-cost, cohort based education program at the core of SBTDC's Business Launch Program that targets high-potential startups within urban entrepreneurial ecosystems.

During the 8-hour in person course, participants will perform both in-class and out-of-class activities that will help them form a viable business within the timeframe of the course. Activities are supplemented by one-on-one SBTDC counseling.

What you'll learn:

- Business Planing
- Financial Projections
- Market and Industry Research
- Business Financing
- Customer Discovery
- Digital Marketing
- Networking
- Legal Framework



March 12-26



10:00 AM – 1:00 PM



No Cost



Wilmington (CIE)



sbtdc.org/site/taking-the-leap

