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WESST Ready To Celebrate 21st Birthday With Big Bash

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WESST is having a coming-of-age moment this week.

The nonprofit that helps business start and grow is celebrating its 21st birthday with a big bash Wednesday in an event that includes speakers, music, door prizes, food, birthday cake — and, of course, wine and a champagne toast.

"It's really intended to be a celebration ... and it's also going to be a great big thank you for lots of folks who have supported the organization with their time, with their money, with their talents, who have helped us and have helped our clients," Agnes Noonan, president of WESST, told the Journal.

The Women's Economic Self-Sufficiency Team, or WESST, was founded in 1989 by two PNM executives, Joellyn Murphy and Carol Radosevich, and an initial executive director, Jessica Glicken as an organization geared toward women who wanted to start or grow businesses.

The organization now offers training, consulting, loans and incubation, among other services to new and existing small businesses around the state.

"We're really proud of a record where the goal has always been to work with those, no matter what their socioeconomic status, if they have an idea or they're really on fire about a small business then our mission is to try and work with them and help them really realize that dream," Noonan said.

Of course, not all businesses make it to the finish line. Noonan said many entrepreneurs mistakenly think access to capital is the key to success.

"They've got to have that passion and drive themselves and if they don't have that it won't matter," she said.

Over its 21 years, WESST has helped start or grow 2,035 businesses which have created 3,200 jobs with \$4.5 million in loans, Noonan said. Clients generated \$100 million in sales revenue over the past five years.

WESST has six offices in New Mexico and opened a \$10.4 million, state-of-the-art, 37,000-square-foot, mixed-use enterprise center at 609 Broadway NE last year.

The center is an incubator for start-ups that currently houses ten businesses in a variety of industries, such as biomedical technology, roofing and medical billing among others, Wally Grangmeister, vice president of WESST, told the Journal.

WESST would have celebrated its 20th anniversary last year if it had not been for the opening of the enterprise center, Noonan said.

"We decided in '09 that rather than trying to do another major event ... let's just wait until next year and we can do some fun things with the turning 21," she said.

Slate Street Cafe, a WESST client, will be catering the event, and other clients like Betty's Bath and Day Spa, among others, will be providing door prizes.

Many current and former clients will be attending the bash at the enterprise center, Noonan and Grangmeister said.

Board members, volunteers and others in the business community are also expected to attend the event which will include speeches from Sen. Tom Udall, Pedro Garza, regional director for the U.S. Economic Development Administration and Ana Recio Harvey, Small Business Administration assistant administrator for Women's Business Ownership, among others.

For more on the event, contact WESST's Albuquerque office at 246-6900.

Celebrating 21 years

- 2,035 business starts
- 3,200 jobs created
- \$4.5 million in loans
- WESST clients generated over \$100 million in sales revenue over the past five years

— Source: WESST

For more information

on WESST or its 21st birthday party, visit www.west.org or call 1-800-GOWESST(469-3778).