

CAP planning class instrumental in aiding expansion of Payton's Produce



Bill Wagner / The Daily News Christy Payton is quick to sing the praises of the CAP financial independence center programs which helped her and her husband figure out how to make their Payton's Produce business a going operation.

By Erik Olson / The Daily News | Posted: Friday, April 15, 2011

When Christy and Les Payton opened a produce stand in Lexington three years ago, they were long on ambition but short on business savvy.

Now, with the help of Lower Columbia CAPS's financial planning program, the Paytons are on solid footing and ready to expand. Now based out of Longview, the couple plans to open a second year-round Payton's Produce store next month at the corner of South Pacific Avenue and Ash Street in Kelso.

"We weren't very good planners before," Christy Payton said Friday.

Last summer was a slow growing season, limiting the Paytons' inventories of local produce, such as Willow Grove corn. According to Christy Payton, however, their market still had a steady stream of customers looking for fresh fruits and vegetables, which she says the store purchases primarily from growers in the fertile Yakima Valley.

The demand for fresh produce is strong in Cowlitz County, and the Paytons have just needed to develop an expansion plan for another store, Payton said. The store has also picked up more customers since Longview Produce on California Way shut down earlier this year, she said.

Other factors helped, but Payton credited the 11-week CAP program for giving her the knowledge to expand and open a second store.

"Those people that are working over there (CAP) care about their jobs and helping people," Payton said.

On Wednesday, CAP's Financial Independence Center is starting its newest Business 101 classes. The six-week course includes one-on-one coaching and assistance with business plans, financial management and basic accounting skills.

"Most people fail in business because of a lack of adequate planning and preparation, which often causes them to make avoidable mistakes, or worse. This course teaches the skills needed to start one's business on a solid foundation," said Marcel Goulet, director of the Financial Independence Center.

The classes, known as the Business Builder Program, are funded by a two-year, \$73,141 community development block grant from the city of Longview.

The program, which is free, helped the Paytons with basic personal finance, which Christy Payton said strengthened their business. Instead of taking out a loan to buy a \$2,000 ice machine to chill fresh vegetables, the Paytons set aside money every week for about a year with the goal of buying the machine without a loan, thus avoiding interest charges.

When they finally saved enough money last month, Payton said she found an online deal on an ice machine for \$500. The leftover money will go back into the business, she said.

"We're just buying things that we can, when we can," Payton said.