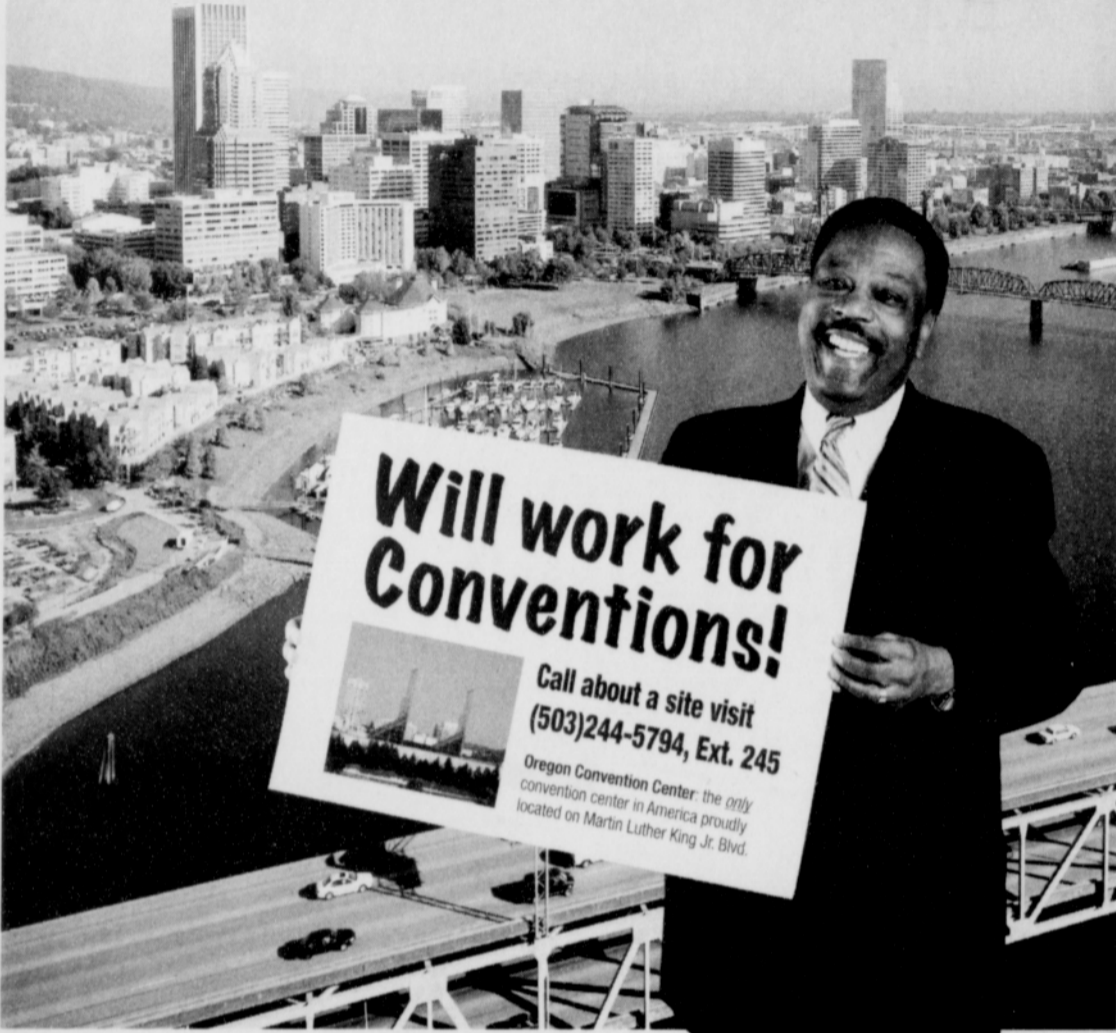


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# From Heart to Startup

## Class builds reality for small-business ideas

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

If you're looking to start your own business and find your way to a classroom tucked away in the Lloyd Center Mall, you might also find some reassurance.

The Small Business Development Center started during the early '80s when the state was in an economic recession. Since then, it has helped hundreds of people realize dreams to run their own businesses.

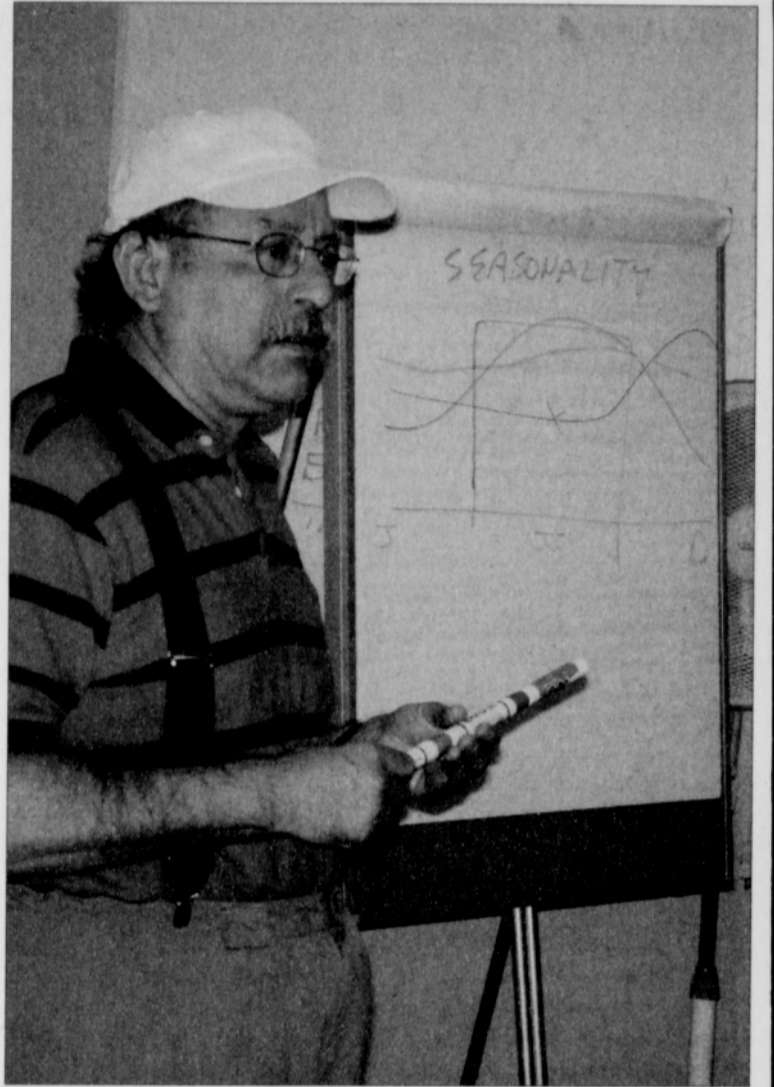
Most of the classes begin at 6:30 p.m., intended for those with day jobs. They had been working all day, but new life sparked in the eyes of students last Wednesday evening as Mario Pedraza began a participatory lecture on the considerations of starting a new enterprise.

Pedraza reviewed the basics at the outset: the importance of location, of finding a large customer base and the necessity of losing money during the first year. Then he made the class consider some of the more advanced topics like regulations.

The Portland Community College students succeed in this setting based on their drive alone regardless of other factors, according to Tom Lowles, the program's director.

"We work with people from a variety of backgrounds, experiences and skills," says Lowles, "but it all comes down to whether an individual really wants to start their business."

The reason for the program's esteem is clear: When it comes to helping Spanish-speaking small-business owners get started in the U.S., Pedraza literally wrote the book. His trans-



BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER  
Mario Pedraza leads a Portland Community College class intended to help people get their business ideas going.

lated version of the Oregon program's materials became the model now used by similar centers around the country.

Although he would love to help more Spanish-speaking people start businesses in Portland, he sees a limitation in being a "third-generation" Texan, meaning his grandparents were his family members to cross the border.

"It's hard, because I can't be their mentor or their role model," Pedraza says. "They'd rather

hear from first-generation people, but then the problem with that is those people are tired of being asked."

Knowing that Spanish speakers have little choice in coming to him with business ideas, Pedraza will sit down with them one-on-one for hours, most often helping them fill out forms.

"In the long run, a business is a business," says Lowles, "and on that level, quite frankly, everyone's the same."

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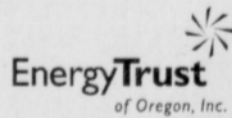
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