

Resources Aplenty for New Business Owners

Getting advice an important process for ownership

BY COLIN STAUB
PORTLAND OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Starting a small business is a daunting task, but potential business owners in our area may have an advantage. Even as resources for small business owners in California and other states face budget cuts, Oregon continues to provide its own services with funding and support.

"Oregon has it figured out," says Tammy Marquez-Oldham, director of the Portland Small Business Development Center. "Oregon is doing a great job."

Portland's SBDC is one of 19 similar centers around the state, which form a network that has been active since 1983. Most of the centers are affiliated with community colleges, and Portland's is located at Portland Community College's CLIMB (Continuing Learning for Individuals, Management and Business) Center.

The facility, located at 1626 S.E. Water Ave., offers a variety of services for individuals looking to start their own business. Business advising is one of its core resources.

"Long-term business advising creates a thriving business," says Marquez-Oldham. "We have years of data to support that."

While business advising is important throughout the stages of business ownership, it is particularly vital in the beginning. There are numerous differing statistics about business failure rates, but most suggest that the initial stages of business ownership will make or break the business.

Advising in the first stages focuses on educating the business owner and helping them secure capital. The Portland SBDC connects its clients with its Capital Access Team, which can advise on how best to secure funding for a new business. It helps new owners work with Portland organizations such as Mercy Corps Northwest, which can help individuals with limited financial resources save money for their business.

The Portland SBDC also con-

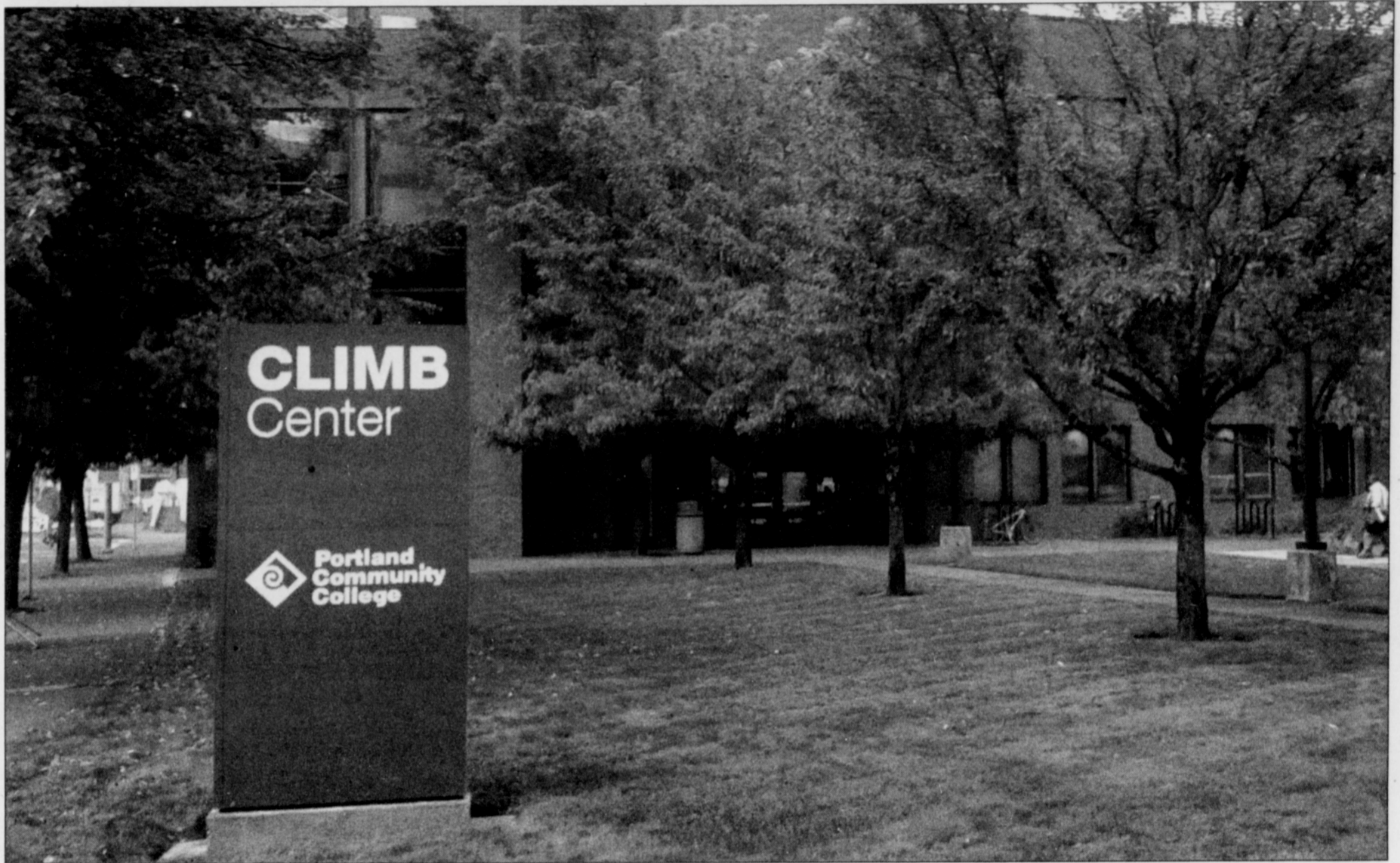


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Portland Community College's CLIMB center is a small business development destination for those wanting to learn some of the ins and outs of starting a business. This building is located at 1626 S.E. Water Ave.



Tammy Marquez-Oldham

nects new owners with the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs, which has worked to promote economic development for ethnic minorities since 1987.

Marquez-Oldham emphasizes the value of business advising for minority business owners, as it can help even the playing field.

"Support to minority small business owners is incredibly important, because sometimes they're starting not from a ground level, but from below a ground level," she says. "So they're having to move up to the ground level before they can even start."

As a very first step, even before coming to the SBDC, Marquez-Oldham recommends a simple procedure. "Look up and around, and do some really basic research, to say 'is my idea unique enough that I can compete in the marketplace? Who is my competitor? What are they charging? How am I uniquely different? How will my customer know me?' Sometimes people become very enamored with their business idea, and believe they don't

have competition. Everyone has competition. Even before they come to us they need to identify, what is my company?"

The Portland SBDC hosts an orientation every week, which is a great resource for people considering starting a business, or current business owners who would like to grow. Aside from gaining insight into the world of small business ownership, these orientations provide other positive experiences.

"You learn you're not alone," says Marquez-Oldham. The orientations usually have about 30 attendees, every week. Sitting side by side with others interested in starting a business, people begin to talk. "Pretty soon, they start seeing how they could work together, and this really great networking takes place."

The next New Client Orientation will take place Monday, Oct. 6, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the PCC CLIMB Center. It is free of charge.

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