KSBDC partners to launch Hispanic businesses

Richard Zarate (left) and Whitney Davison, information services manager, Johnson County Library, assist Antonia Perez in his research.

Richard Zarate, director of business and economic growth for the Hispanic Economic Development Corporation, promotes economic development in the Hispanic community every Monday night on his 30-minute segment, *El Momento Empresarial,* on radio station La Super X 1250 AM. The English tagline is "The more you listen, the more you learn."

Fourteen students followed up on Zarate's enthusiasm and their own entrepreneurial spirit by enrolling in the first-ever Primer Paso FastTrac program in Johnson County. Sponsored by the JCCC Kansas Small Business Development Center, HEDC and Johnson County Library, the program met Wednesday nights Aug. 19-Nov. 4 at the Oak Park Library. Three men and 11 women, ranging in age from 25 to 49, were in the program with enterprising ideas from restaurants to recycling.

Taught by a certified team of bilingual facilitators, Primer Paso FastTrac in Johnson County is a 36-hour business training course that is designed to introduce business concepts to current and aspiring entrepreneurs who have little or no business experience. The 12-week course focuses on students' completion of a feasibility/business plan for a business concept.

"You can feel the energy in the room," Zarate said of students. "When people come to class with so much passion and so much desire to learn, it is very exciting. Our students come here after a full day of work and apply themselves to their assignments. We appreciate the hard work they are doing."

Student Gustavo Hernandez said, "I decided to take the class because I need to learn more in order to open my own business. I am learning something new every time I come to class."

Luz Diaz and Lucy Oropeza, certified teachers, enrolled in the class together in order to start a bilingual early childhood education business.

"We know about teaching, but we need knowledge about bookkeeping and license requirements and those types of things so we can maintain our business at a level of high quality for a long time."

This is the second class of the Primer Paso FastTrac program offered by the JCCC KSBDC and HEDC. The first one was in Wyandotte County at Donnelly College in spring 2009, graduating 13 Hispanic entrepreneurs. Malinda Bryan-Smith, regional director, JCCC KSBDC, says the Center plans to continue two Primer Paso FastTrac courses per year – one

in Johnson County, one in Wyandotte County.

"The JCCC KSBDC got involved in the program because we want to serve a segment of our customer base that we had not served before," Bryan-Smith said. "By partnering with the HEDC and the Johnson County Library, we are able to tie into the college's initiative to ensure that diversity, equity and inclusion are key components in all JCCC programs."

The KSBDC is also part of the Workforce, Community and Economic Development division's Latino Institute, which was organized in an effort to make sure the needs of the Hispanic population are being met. Primer Paso FastTrac is a product developed by the Kansas City-based Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

"It is easy for a person to start a business, but it not so easy to succeed," Bryan-Smith said. "We want to be there in the beginning to help folks so they have the skills and knowledge they need to grow their businesses and create jobs."

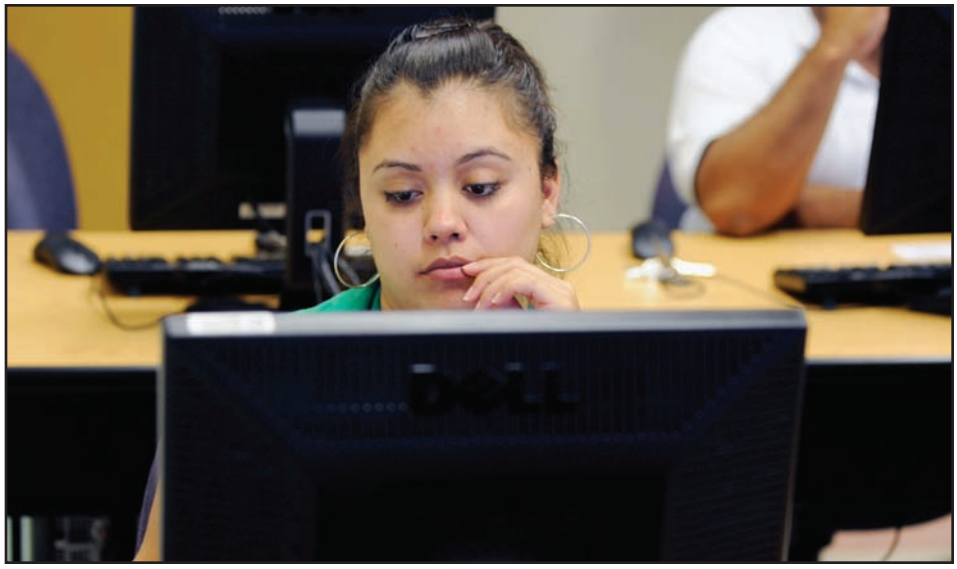
Primer Paso FastTrac concludes with a graduation where students present feasibility/business plans and talk about why their plans are good ventures as part of an "executive summary presentation." The JCCC KSBDC and HEDC will continue to support new graduates in their business ventures.

The JCCC KSBDC provides free, confidential, one-on-one consulting to current and prospective small business owners in Johnson, Miami and Wyandotte counties. The JCCC KSBDC is part of a statewide network of eight regional centers and nine outreach centers in Kansas and is a grant-funded program under the U.S. Small Business Administration, Kansas Department of Commerce and JCCC.

For more information on services available from the JCCC KSBDC, contact 913-469-3878 or ksbdc@jccc.edu or visit the Web site, www.jccc.edu/ksbdc. Im

Richard Zarate, director, business and economic growth, HEDC, and Malinda Bryan-Smith, regional director, JCCC KSBDC, talk prior to a Primer Paso FastTrac session.

Gustavo Hernandez says he wants to learn more in order to open his own business.



Sara Ramirez researches business opportunities at the Johnson County Central Resource Library.