

## St. Mary's Supportive of Small Businesses

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Many small businesses feel the effects of today's shaky economy. In St. Mary's County, there is help available to those looking to start or grow a local, small business. The County's Department of Economic and Community Development offers many resources to business owners for help with everything from start-up loans to maintaining a highly qualified workforce.

The DECD's Manager of Business Development Hans Welch said, "Our mission is to help these independent businesses grow and create local jobs." Welch explained that business retention is a priority for SMC and how cooperative efforts, like the defense sector's Pax Partnership, help keep small businesses thriving.

"We have a goldmine of small, independent businesses in our county," Welch said, adding the great thing about DECD's services is, "it's F-R-E-E." This no-cost support can supply business owners with the training and tools necessary to withstand a poor economy and continue offering the types of small specialty shops and locally owned and ran stores that, as Welch said, "offer products and services you just can't get else where."

While growth in the county has prompted more competition from 'big-box stores' and chain restaurants, small businesses remain a vital part of SMC's economic sustainability.

The DECD invites independent, local business owners to a Roundtable at Lenny's Restaurant Jan. 11, 8:30 a.m. and offers information through its website, [www.stmarysmd.com/decd](http://www.stmarysmd.com/decd).

Programs are available through the Community Development Corporation, for those businesses in one of the County's 11 Priority Funding Areas, including Lexington Park. For details, call 240-725-5786. Classes and advising through the Md. Small Business Development Center are available in Lexington Park and information is available by checking out <http://www.sbdchelp.com/>.

If you're a struggling small business owner or one just looking to stay on top of your game, take advantage of the help available and stay tuned to TBN for local business news.