

HAWAII SBDC SUCCESS STORY - WEST HAWAII CENTER



Diamond Sprinkler and Farm Supply

Lynnett Tohara's story epitomizes the path from skilled employee to business owner that the SBDC sees so often in its work with startups. For 12 years Lynnett was General Manager for a large irrigation supply company located in Kailua Kona, and, uniquely, a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field. Her expertise and familiarity with the industry and the customers grew over the years, but she grew increasingly dissatisfied with the way the business was operated as it was purchased first by one national company, and then shortly thereafter by another.

With each purchase, the company moved further from the customer-centric way of doing business that fits so well with Lynnett's mindset to what she characterizes as a "corporate mentality" that put sales and profits first, and customers second. Lynnett knew there was a better way to run a company, and she wanted a chance to try, so she approached the SBDC to help her create a business plan and financial projections so she could secure financing. The financial aspect was especially crucial to her business as this industry requires very large and expensive product orders and here in Hawaii we are faced with long lead shipping times for bulky products, so cash flow was key in the plan.

Success, for Lynnett, is less of a goal and more of "a work in process, heading in the right direction, with a few walls and hills to climb in the meantime," she says. Diamond Sprinkler is indeed climbing that hill, guided by what Lynnett calls her three guiding business principles: providing customers with what they need, pricing it advantageously for them and the company, and being the one-stop service shop for all her customers' needs, whether product or expert advice. It's all about the customer for Lynnett: "You need to give the customer 100 reasons why they want you in their corner."

SBDC is proud to have gotten the chance to be in Lynnett's corner!