

BUILDING Better Business

BY KATHLEEN CRAVEN

As the Treasure Valley and state emerge from the economic doldrums of the early 2000s, it's clear that Boise State continues to be a major player. The university's entrepreneurial spirit has both enhanced its reputation and helped with the Gem State's improving financial stability. With its unique programs, enterprising services and creative people, Boise State is helping to unite and improve the economic fortunes of the university, state and region. In this issue of FOCUS we look at the many ways Boise State is helping to shape the landscape of Idaho business and industry.

There's no doubt about it – Boise is a bona fide hotbed of business and industry. Not only can the metropolitan area claim as its own well-known companies such as Micron, Albertsons, Simplot, Boise Cascade and a large division of Hewlett-Packard, it's also known for the entrepreneurial spirit that has helped launch a myriad of smaller businesses, particularly in the high-tech arena, and the tax-friendly atmosphere it offers corporations looking to relocate.

This past May Boise was ranked as the No. 1 place in the country to do business by *Forbes* magazine and No. 2 by *Inc.* magazine, beating out such business powerhouses as Las Vegas, Austin, Texas, and San Jose, Calif. Boise's metro area was cited for its exceptional growth, cost of living and quality of life. And topping the list of amenities noted by *Inc.* was this gem: A growing local university.

"When businesses consider an area, they need to understand as much as possible what resources will help

them to succeed," says Shirl Boyce, vice president of economic development for the Boise Valley Economic Partnership, a branch of the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce. "BSU is pivotal to that."

Boyce notes a strength in the relationship between Boise State and the community that many people are not aware of. "BSU is inextricably interwoven with what we're doing," he says. "The ability of post-secondary education to retain and update skill sets is absolutely critical to what goes on."

Since the early 1970s, demographers have been predicting that the demand for a highly skilled (i.e. technical) work force will eventually outpace supply. A university that can help fill that gap is essential to a community's success, he says.

And while officials like Boyce focus on assets that will attract new businesses to the valley, Boise State is also working to help those that are already here create and grow new ventures.

"We don't need new companies to



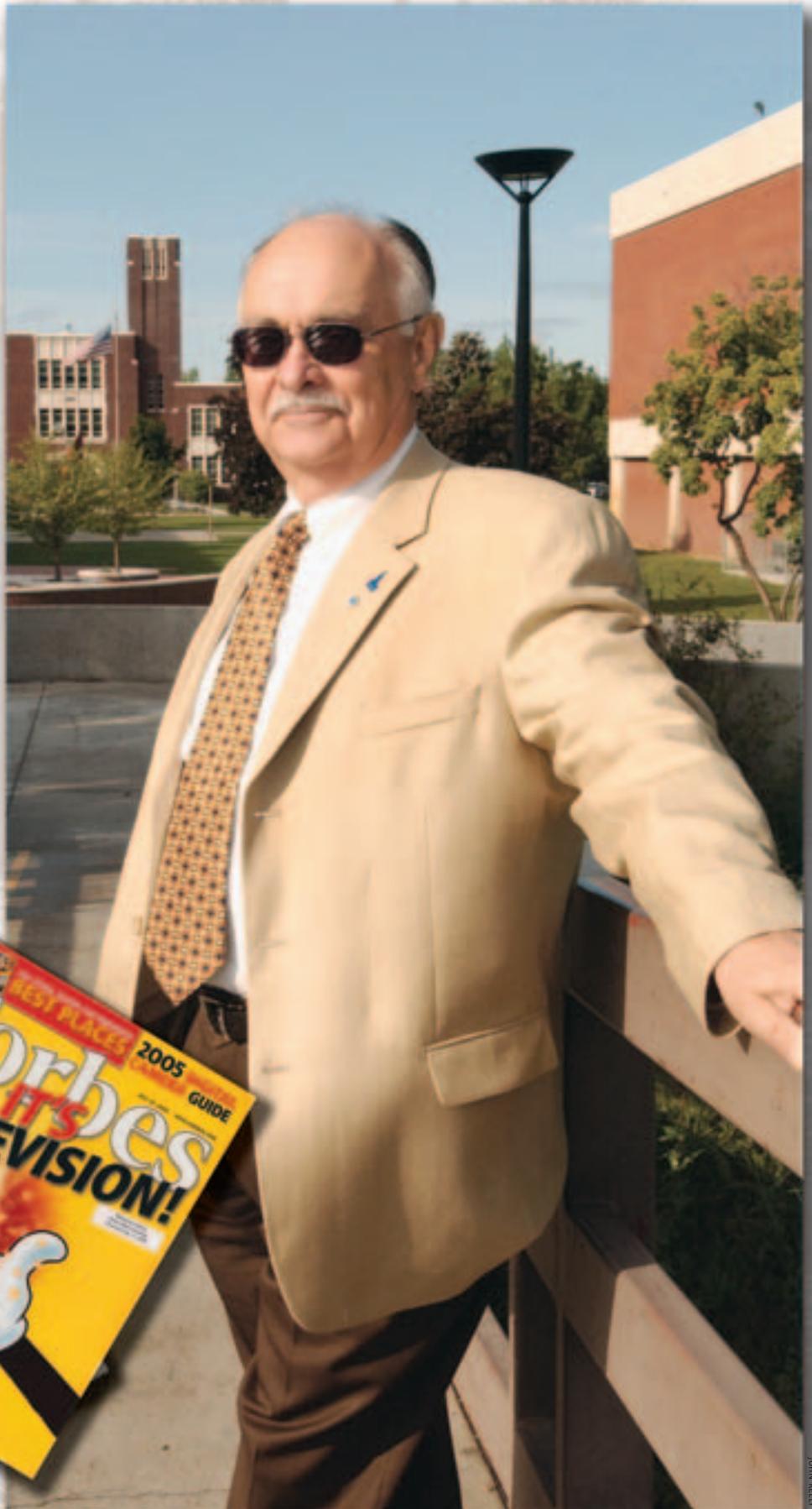
CARRIE QUINNEY

move here, we just need talented people and we can create our own businesses," says Phil Bradley, chief financial officer for the homegrown software company ProClarity. "A lot of talented people are moving here for the lifestyle. They are an unbelievable resource to pull into a new venture."

To that end, an entrepreneurship program as accessible as Boise State's is incredibly important in terms of developing good business, he says.

Boise State's program, part of the university's Department of Management, leads would-be business owners all the way through the process of starting a new business, from writing a business plan to expanding the operation. Many courses in the program are helpful to current business owners as well, encouraging creative thinking and innovation.

In their May issues, both *Inc.* and *Forbes* magazines ranked Boise as a top place to do business. Chamber of Commerce vice president Shirl Boyce (right) and others are working to continue that success.



Carrying that a step further, Boise State is also establishing itself as a leader in promoting social entrepreneurship, a field that creates new independent or corporate ventures that provide both a social benefit and financial return on investment.

“It’s really exciting to see what’s happening here and around the world with social ventures,” says entrepreneurship professor Norris Krueger, a national expert who teaches innovative entrepreneurship classes and recently presented a paper on his work at the first International Social Entrepreneurship Research Conference in Barcelona, Spain. His course takes students from the classroom into the community to develop business plans for nonprofit groups and provide a variety of other outreach efforts.

Business also benefits when the

city and university collaborate on projects with clear economic benefits. Boise State and the city recently partnered to request federal funding to bring a geothermal line that lies north of the Boise River south to the university. Once that line has been brought across, it will be available to public and private entities interested in development.

“We know there is some interest in developing that area for residential or mixed use,” Boise Mayor David Bieter says, “so this project has real good potential for both the city and the university.”

In addition to entrepreneurial courses and partnerships, the university provides key support to businesses in the form of the Idaho Small Business Development Center (Idaho SBDC), TechHelp, the Center for Professional Development and other

entities.

Ed Zimmer, president and CEO of Boise-based ECCO, says the Idaho SBDC was an excellent resource for his company when it was just starting out, as were faculty in the College of Business and Economics. An accounting professor acted as an independent evaluator of the company’s employee stock ownership plan, and Roy Glen, in management, has served as the company’s strategic planning facilitator since the early ’90s.

Boise State has also provided ECCO with several interns, most of whom were hired by the company following their graduation. In fact, the university trains a huge share of the work force valleywide.

Boise State bachelor’s and master’s graduates work in every imaginable industry, including health care, engineering, business and the arts. In



CARRIE QUINNEY

Entrepreneurship professor Norris Krueger partners with local businesses to teach social entrepreneurship concepts to business students.

Alumni Profile

Tam banks on success

Regal Financial Bank anchors the IDX Tower at Third Avenue and Marion Street in the heart of downtown Seattle. The only independent commercial bank whose main offices are located in Seattle's financial district, it neighbors such banking giants as Bank of America, Wells Fargo and Bank of California. For its founder Jesse Tam (BBA, marketing, '75), the bank symbolizes what personal desire and an entrepreneurial spirit can achieve.

As a youngster, Tam traveled with his dad, an international banker, to destinations outside of their home country of Hong Kong and inside the world of banking. He has since racked up 28 years of formal banking experience, now serving as president and chief executive officer of Regal.

"As a young person, I made up my mind to go far, to see the world," he says.

Tam's quest began a few weeks after graduating from high school in 1971. He left Hong Kong for Twin Falls, Idaho, on a study abroad program – quite an adjustment from a high school that had more students than his new town had in total population at the time.

In 1975 Tam put his newly earned bachelor's degree from Boise State to work, managing a branch of First Security Bank in Boise. He moved to Washington in 1980 to accept a job with Rainier Bank.

He was just 28 and living his dream, traveling the world as an international banker. He finished his MBA at City University in Seattle on evenings and weekends and became one of the youngest vice presidents at Seattle First National Bank, which had just been acquired by Bank of America.

After spending a couple of years as an investment banker with Pacific First Bank, Tam lost his job in a round of layoffs. But it hardly turned out to be a negative. He started his own consulting firm, tried his hand at running a small business and learned how to start a company from scratch.

A short time later he joined a friend and established his first bank, AEA Bank in Seattle, and then in 1998 formed Northwest International Bank, his second community bank. At the heart of both were Tam's international experiences and his knack for finding a niche market.

He sold his interests in his former ventures to concentrate on his clients at Regal, which has been serving the greater Seattle community as well as businesses in the western United States since April 2002. His future plans include opening a bank office in Asia.

– Sherry Squires



JOHN KELLY

addition, the Seland College of Applied Technology provides career training for the 70 to 80 percent of jobs the U.S. Department of Labor says require less than a four-year degree.

"To have such a great university in the state capital is so important in our recruiting and training efforts," says Roger Madsen, director of the Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor. "BSU is an absolutely phenomenal asset, not only for Boise, but for the entire region and the state."

Bieter doubts the city would even be in the same ballpark as its closest competitors without the presence of a quality university. For companies looking to relocate, he says, the presence of an institution ready and able to provide work force training and continuing education is critical.

"I've talked to several companies that have good employees who lack some expertise or need additional education. To have a university right here is a big advantage to them," he says.

Outside of the office, companies

want to locate in an environment that supports the arts and recreation. The higher an area's quality of life, the more attractive it is to potential hires.

"The draw of these activities, whether it's music, theater or even sports, adds to the quality of life," Bieter says. And activities such as the Fettuccine Forum, a monthly public affairs lecture, engage the community and help them become more involved.

The visibility of Boise State's football team has been particularly helpful in recruitment efforts, says ProClarity's Bradley. "When we're recruiting people from out of the area, they don't really know about Boise, but they know the team. And they know we have a big-time university located in the city. That helps with Boise's credibility."

And while rankings come and go, that credibility is here to stay.

Says Boyce: "At the end of the day, if everything went to hell in a hand basket, Boise State would still be there to deliver [the goods] for the area."

AFTER Crash, Treasure Valley Hi-Tech Industry Reboots

BY LARRY BURKE

Anyone who works or invests in a high-technology business knows the thrills of riding an economic roller coaster, with promising climbs and frightening descents mixed with an occasional calming plateau.

Four years ago, the Treasure Valley's high-tech roller coaster began a head-long plunge as companies laid off workers and profits dipped. Now analysts say the long downhill ride is over and most firms are going up again.

"In terms of the overall economy, high technology is definitely on the upswing. I'm surprised at how strong it has been over the last year ... high-tech has actually added jobs," says John Church, a special lecturer with Boise State's College of Business and Economics and a longtime analyst of the Idaho economy.

Manufacturing employment in the Treasure Valley peaked at 36,200 work-

ers at the end of 2000. Three years later there were 6,500 fewer jobs. In the past year 900 jobs have returned, about a three percent growth rate.

"This time it looks a little more sustained ... it looks like it has come back rather strongly," adds Church.

Cheryl Schrader, dean of Boise State's College of Engineering, works almost daily with the region's high-tech businesses. She, too, reports encouraging signs.

"Companies are looking forward. We are seeing higher interest from companies who want to partner with the college to meet their growth needs," she says.

Schrader cites employment as another indicator. "Graduates aren't having any trouble finding jobs ... their hardest decision is deciding which offer to take."

Of course, the billion-dollar question looms large: How can Idaho, a tradi-

tionally resource-based state, make a successful transition to the "knowledge" economy where ideas and innovation are the new crops to be harvested?

Some say the future of Idaho's economic well-being depends on the answer.

"At some point we have to realize that technology is driving our whole economy ... we are trying to build more awareness about how important high tech is," says Karl Tueller, director of the state's new Office of Science and Technology.

The formation of the office last year is itself a sign that Idaho is beginning to put more emphasis on technology-based businesses. Now, the state has a place where business, education and state government can coordinate their efforts. And technology finally has an advocate in the Legislature and elsewhere.

"We needed some entity in state government to be a catalyst for technology. Our economic development structure has been built around our traditional industries," says Tueller. "The establishment of this office signaled that state government was serious about the technology sector. We have a lot of strengths, but unless we identify those and support them more,

Karl Tueller heads up Idaho's new Office of Science and Technology, aimed at increasing awareness of the growing industry's impact on the state.



we are going to have a hard time competing with other states that invest more money in science and technology. Some states have been doing this for 20 years.”

One of the key arrows in Idaho’s high-tech development quiver is Boise State University, which provides two key ingredients – engineering/technical education and support for business development.

The colleges of Engineering and Applied Technology provide a steady supply of skilled employees as well as research, consulting and other services such as TechHelp, an extension program that includes a facility to make computer-aided prototypes that detect flaws before goods are manufactured.

Cooperation with industry is a hallmark of the engineering college, which at less than 10 years old is still a newcomer to Idaho’s high-tech scene.

This year, for example, the College of Engineering formed a partnership with the Micron Technology Foundation to begin a bachelor’s degree program in materials science and engineering. A master’s is soon to follow.

“Companies like to locate where there is a strong college of engineering,” says Schrader. “There is a direct correlation between a college of engineering and the ability to recruit and retain high-tech businesses.”

While all eyes are focused on the colossal giants of the valley’s high tech hierarchy, analysts say future growth of Idaho’s technology-based economy is more likely to come from home-grown businesses.

After all, Micron Technology started when brothers Joe and Ward Parkinson had the audacious idea to build a better computer chip.

Until recently, those fledgling businesses were more or less on their own to navigate the thicket of business plans, accounting systems, marketing strategies and other details that can

lead to success or failure.

But over the past four years programs have been put in place to assist those firms.

Boise State, for example, reaches many of those businesses through TechHelp, the Idaho Small Business Development Center and the Technology and Entrepreneurial Center (TECenter), an incubator for technology-based businesses.

“Today we are a lot closer to having an infrastructure than we were four years ago,” says John Glerum, director of the TECenter, which opened in 2003 and now supports 22 new high-tech-based entrepreneurs. “We have a sense of where the pieces are and how to put them together. We haven’t optimized the process yet, but we are to the point now where we can start doing things. We are starting to see those small businesses take hold ... we are starting to see clusters here already ... clusters of software, clusters of Internet-based businesses.”

Glerum, Richard Vycital, Idaho SBDC Region III director, and Idaho SBDC technology business consultant Rick Ritter recently presented their wares to an overflowing room full of Hewlett-Packard employees who participated in the firm’s voluntary severance program that reduced the workforce by 350.

The high level of interest is an indication that many of those employees are intent on starting their own businesses, which will result in another wave of entrepreneurs eager to test their new ideas in the marketplace, Ritter says. “One of the things they are talking about is that next bubble [like the one] that produced Extended Systems and Computrol. We are right at the edge of that.

Technology transfer – moving ideas from the lab to the marketplace – is a constant challenge facing Idaho’s high-tech entrepreneurs. Too many good ideas are left on the shelf because of the lack of venture capital or because

Alumni Profile

Brown gets families closer to home



Michael D. Brown (BS, quantitative management, '89; MBA, '93) was in his 20s when he started a small construction company in southwestern Idaho, and thus his entrepreneurial journey.

While he was at Boise State, an internship position in production planning at Hewlett-Packard led to a long career with the computer giant. He started work as a process engineer, then shifted into a business role in HP’s materials organization while earning his MBA from Boise State. He held various positions as he worked his way up the corporate ladder, eventually becoming HP’s global director of procurement reengineering.

Brown counts among his career highlights the opportunity to help execute the largest merger in computer industry history with HP and Compaq, leading an international team of IT engineers to develop a Web-based global e-commerce purchasing system and the chance to drive process and quality innovation across a global business model.

Always an entrepreneur, Brown founded Gibraltar Investments while still with HP and now serves as its president and CEO. The company specializes in real estate investing, renovating and reselling homes to people in financially challenged positions. He recently expanded the business from San Diego, where it is headquartered, to Las Vegas.

Gibraltar specializes in working with people who cannot qualify to purchase a home using traditional methods. By using creative financing techniques and private funding sources, Gibraltar is able to provide families with customized solutions. The company works closely with homebuyers to tailor the financing and help them achieve both the satisfaction and benefits of home ownership.

Brown says real estate offered him a great chance to blend his small and corporate business experience with a business mission of helping people. In addition, because most traditional lenders and the real estate industry target buyers with good credit, it leaves a large number of potential clients who need the services offered by Gibraltar.

Brown says he enjoys owning his own business.

“Running a small business can be a very satisfying experience,” Brown says. “Small companies are able to react quickly to shifts in market dynamics and obtain almost immediate feedback on whether business strategies are working as intended.”

– Sherry Squires

the entrepreneurs don't have the skills to bring their products to market.

Vycital says Idaho is No. 1 in patent filings per capita, but lags in turning those into commercial activities. "We are an idea state," he says.

"Technologies have been left on the shelf because the process to get them to market wasn't as good as it is now.

More attention needs to be placed on getting resources to individuals at the concept level – that's where the rubber hits the road, and that's where the help is needed."

Adds Glerum: "If we are better in three to five years, it will be because we figured out how to do technology transfer better. If we don't continue to improve in those areas, we will have missed our chance to succeed."

While Idaho has taken the first steps to improve its services to the technology industry, there is a long way to go before it matches the efforts of even the smallest states. North Dakota, for example, is devoting \$50 million to tech development over the next two years.

Increased support for education is at the forefront of the wish lists. "In the industrial age we never looked to universities for much," Glerum says.

"Today, in the information age, we are dependent on universities for our creativity, innovation and understanding of science – the dependency is going up significantly. Even the medium-sized companies are really focused on education. That's different than it was."

Says Schrader: "Idaho has an opportunity to invest in the future of the state by investing not only in higher education, but also in support infrastructure that assists new business development."

In the meantime, those who support Idaho's technology-based business will soldier on.

"Because we have minimal dollar resources, we have to be pretty creative about how we do the things needed to encourage more businesses to start and have long-term success," Vycital says.

"[Those] resources that have moved our direction have significantly improved our capabilities. We just need to see more commitment, because it's far behind what is needed."



CARRIE QUINNEY

Engineering dean Cheryl Schrader, pictured in front of Boise State's rapid prototype machine with a model of a bicycle helmet, says a strong college of engineering is a draw for business.

Social Entrepreneur Gives Building Supplies a 'Second Chance'

BY ANNA FRITZ

When is a stack of lumber more than just a stack of lumber? When does it benefit not only a lucky homeowner but also the environment and the community as well?

It happens when it arrives at a new kind of thrift store in downtown Boise called Second Chance Building Center, where donated lumber and other building materials become part of a cycle that allows them to provide benefits far beyond their intended purpose.

Here's how it works: This humble stack joins other piles of donated lumber sorted by size and type in a warehouse crammed with sinks, tubs, windows, fencing, lighting, insulation and even a staircase. The lumber and other materials, arriving used from a remodeled home or new from a retailer like Home Depot, are then purchased by a low-income buyer who couldn't afford to remodel without a price break. Or they might go home with a buyer who can afford new materials but prefers to buy used to keep them out of the landfill.

Either way, the community benefits by circulating construction goods instead of throwing them away, says Melanie Curtis (BA, social work, '86), executive director of the nonprofit building center and the driving force behind a complex partnership of inter-related programs that support the common good.

"People tell us they've been waiting for a place like ours to open" says Curtis, Idaho's 2004 Social Worker of the Year. "Not just for the bargains, but to donate. We've had a very positive response."

In addition to running Second Chance, Curtis is executive director of Supportive Housing and Innovative Partnerships (SHIP), a nonprofit program that provides "clean and sober" housing, peer support, volunteer jobs and other support for people who struggle with addictions to drugs and

alcohol.

The two ventures support each other: profits from Second Chance are used to support SHIP housing, and volunteers from SHIP programs help run the center. The work experience the volunteers gain supports their efforts to become self-sufficient. The synergy doesn't stop there; Curtis also is funneling profits from the building center into plans to fund a much-needed detox center and companion residential treatment program for recovering addicts. Curtis and the Community Detox Coalition are working with Boise Mayor Dave Bieter and his Detox Summit to make community detox in Ada County a reality.

Curtis has based the building center business on successful models in Spokane, Portland and Bellevue, Idaho. She says Boise is ripe for "green building," the recycling and reuse of materials. "I see myself as a social entrepreneur, combining a sustainable business with a social purpose," she adds.

She's not alone. The young but dynamically growing field of social entrepreneurship shows promise to address and perhaps solve some of society's toughest social problems. These independent or corporate ventures pursue dual missions of social benefit and financial return by either turning a profit or becoming self-sufficient.

The center, which opened in early May, aims to do both. Current funding comes almost exclusively from grants, but Curtis expects the profits from the center to make SHIP and its programs self-sustaining.

The Second Chance center is staffed by three employees along with volunteers. It is a partner with Habitat for Humanity and with Boise-based residential and commercial real estate developer David Hale.

"I was impressed with the environmental angle of SHIP and the center," says Hale, who specializes in the devel-



Melanie Curtis uses profits from Second Chance to help people who struggle with addiction to drugs and alcohol.

opment of new houses in established neighborhoods like Boise's North End, "and also with helping addicts in recovery, and with the whole SHIP ripple effect. It fits well with my personal beliefs and development philosophy. I'd like them to be as successful as possible."

SHIP volunteers have deconstructed 10 to 15 homes for Hale in the past year, carefully recovering windows, doors, floors, fixtures and anything else of value that could be reused before the homes were demolished. They stored their treasures in garages around town until the Second Chance center was ready.

With the new business up and running, Curtis' goals for SHIP and Second Chance are ambitious. They include profits strong enough to fund several detox beds for people not covered by grants or insurance and also transitional housing and therapeutic communities for addicts as an alternative to jail time.

"Currently in Idaho persons without resources end up in county jails or prison due to their substance abuse. Prisons in Idaho offer limited help to addicts and waiting lists are long, but we can provide a holistic program that includes housing, treatment and job-readiness training for far cheaper than the \$25,000 a year the prisons spend. With a place to live, support for sobriety and job training, they can become productive citizens in our community."

For more information on SHIP and Second Chance Building Center, visit www.shipinc.org.

BOISE STATE Offers a New

BY SHERRY SQUIRES

When the idea, the money and the know-how meet, great things can happen in the business world. To that end, Boise State University is in the business of providing the knowledge to assist hundreds of Idaho businesses and start-ups each year.

Nimbus 360 owner and founder Bernie Kattner knows firsthand how that help can propel a business forward. His Boise-based company configures and installs high-end audiovisual systems for residential and commercial clients throughout the country. Projects range from simple projectors to full command centers. Kattner started the business in his garage in September 2001. Today it is a \$4 million-\$5 million-a-year business that employs 28 people full time. The company just landed its first international job in England and is a contractor with the national Department of Homeland Security.

When Kattner started, he knew a lot about the systems he designed. But he had unanswered questions about running a business. Were there enough potential clients to sustain Nimbus 360? What were the best ways to reach them? How could he grow, but not grow too fast?

A friend told him to call Rick Ritter at Boise State. That call led to a steady relationship with the university. During the past three years, student teams have conducted market research analyses for Kattner, have written a complete employee handbook for Nimbus 360, and have helped him firm up and update a

business plan. Business experts assisted him with capital investment, and even helped him recruit a bookkeeper. Ritter, Idaho Small Business Development Center technology business consultant, and others at Boise State serve on his company's advisory board.

"I'm getting outside input at every turn," Kattner says. "That has been very valuable to me. Sometimes you get focused internally and you need someone from the outside saying look at this, or pay attention to that."

Nimbus 360 is one of 22 clients of the Technology and Entrepreneurial Center (TECenter), a business incubator in Nampa. The TECenter is at the bottom of the funnel, so to speak, of the services Boise State makes available to businesses. Only those business start-ups that show the greatest

potential for success become clients. Clients pay a fair price for space, and with that space comes a guided tour of all that Boise State offers businesses.

The TECenter has visited with about 350 technology-based ventures since opening its doors in 2003. Many of those that didn't become clients entered the "funnel" in other ways, TECenter director John Glerum says. From cutting-edge technology to manufacturing to small, rural shops, Boise State has an array of resources and services that may be of help.

The Idaho Small Business Development Center is one of the university's primary points of contact for businesses. Rick Vycital, Region III director, fields a number of phone calls each day. He may offer a quick answer or suggestion or he may deter-



Bernie Kattner launched his successful business with the help of Boise State's TECenter.

Network of Support

mine that Boise State can further help the business through a variety of means.

Perhaps business students will dismantle and rebuild a company's operating plan, or offer suggestions to make a product more viable. Or maybe Vycital can hook the business up with potential investors or grant monies. The Idaho SBDC assisted nearly 1,700 small businesses last year with tailored, one-on-one consulting.

For Idaho's manufacturers, TechHelp might offer the answer. The statewide extension office, based locally at Boise State, specializes in manufacturing and technology and is the only organization of its kind in the state. It assists about 200 existing businesses each year, helping them stay alive by growing and innovating, adapting to lean manufacturing principles.

While loose-knit, most of Boise State's programs in one way or another operate under the auspices of the College of Business and Economics. The college is one of only about 30 percent of business programs in the country that are accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Boise State also operates one of the largest internship programs in the Northwest, further adding to the arsenal it offers businesses.

Ritter says faculty and student groups from across campus contribute to the success of the state's businesses. Many of them are inte-

grating academics and teaching with service to businesses.

"It just amazes me how much of this is actually going on," Ritter says. "No one really knows the total of all the pieces, the real impact that Boise State has not only in this community but across the state. If you look at what all of these entities and individuals are contributing, it's huge."

Ritter says there will likely be more successes to share in coming years, as Boise State and other technology advocates around the state find better ways to successfully move ideas uncovered in laboratory research into marketable commercial ideas.

Boise State management professor Newell Gough, who often engages his students with business projects outside of the classroom, says ideally that process will create clients for the TECenter that will then exit the center as viable businesses. Boise State will offer hands-on help throughout the process.

"We as academics fit in there and can be a catalyst," he says.

Those who use Boise State's array of business-assistance offerings give the university high marks for its role in spurring entrepreneurship and stimulating economic growth, and some of those programs have earned recognition outside of the state. BSU's TechConnect program, for instance, received a national best practices award in March from the Small



TECenter director John Glerum (right) assists more than 20 clients at the Nampa-based business incubator, including Brian Ernesto's Neoreef Web site design firm.

Business Administration. Idaho's only public/private organization that focuses solely on technology and its development, transfer, commercialization and impact on the state's economy, TechConnect was honored by the SBA for its market-based initiatives.

"TechConnect is the glue that reminds us that all of these things are connected, or need to be," Glerum says.

Boise State is working to develop a Web site that would be a one-stop shop for businesses, delineating all of the resources that are available at Boise State and addressing issues relevant to the valley's business community.

"We all want the same thing," Glerum says. "The bottom line results are that more people are gainfully employed and there is an increase in the state's economy. Boise State is certainly contributing to that."

THE BUSINESS Of Creativity

BY JULIE HAHN

One is a successful software company that does business around the world. Another is a highly ranked college football team. And a third performs the works of the Bard for thousands of people.

Boise State international business professor Nancy Napier set out to determine what makes these three Boise-based organizations – ProClarity, the Boise State Broncos and the Idaho Shakespeare Festival – click.

The answer has something to do with creativity, and a lot to do with Boise.

Napier found that even though the organizations are very different, they all share similar qualities and creative processes.

“There was more overlap than you can imagine,” she says.

Napier made that discovery after talking to dozens of people across the organizations over the past several months. She found that all three brainstorm, plan, test and test again before rolling out a software program, a game plan or a play. The time elements are different – the Shakespeare Festival takes six to eight months to produce a new play, and the Broncos have just a week or less to plan for the next game – but the creative process is similar.

In addition, all of the organizations see part of their roles as being creative and innovative. They look outside of their own areas of expertise for inspiration, and they are willing to work within their fields to be the best. Those traits can help any business be more successful, Napier says.

Napier published her findings in March in *The Future of Work Agenda*, an online publication, and she will present them in July at the European Group for Organizational Studies conference in Berlin. She hopes that her findings will help spark more discussions about the path Boise should take on its way to becoming a creative community.

Many civic, business and arts leaders think that Boise could become the next Austin or Seattle. Boise State is in a unique position to help the process because it's neutral – with no political agenda – so it's just good territory for ideas and innovation, Napier says.

So what exactly is a “creative communi-

ty”? People such as Richard Florida, who wrote the best-selling *Rise of the Creative Class*, have popularized the idea. Creative communities have several things in common. They have thriving organizations – not just in business, but art, science, literature, fashion, film and research and development. They are diverse, have user-friendly transportation and thriving universities. And they usually have an iconic piece of art or a landmark, such as the Space Needle or the Eiffel Tower.

Could the blue field at Bronco Stadium qualify as such a landmark?

The models for these communities include cities such as Copenhagen, Seattle, Melbourne and Dublin. Instead of bringing in big companies to provide jobs, they attract creative people who put their innovative ideas to work in the form of new businesses, which helps them to compete globally.

“Florida and others show that cities with creative industries grow faster and jobs tend to be higher paying,” Napier says.

Thinking outside of the box is nothing new for Bronco football coach Dan Hawkins. He draws inspiration from many organizations related to sports, academia, religion or politics. The self-professed “big reader” finds ideas in business books, magazines, newspaper articles, even conversations with old friends. This year, he asked his staff to present a “book report” when they returned to school for spring training.

Hawkins likes to find out why businesses succeed. “You think, they must be doing something right,” he says.

That kind of networking and idea sharing is critical to the success of a creative community, says John Hale, office managing partner at KPMG, an audit, tax and advisory firm. He started the TECKLATCH series in Boise, which brings together leaders from different disciplines. In the fall, he hopes to bring speakers from companies such as



Business professor Nancy Napier (right) researched the creative processes of local organizations headed by (from left) Charlie Fee, Idaho Shakespeare Festival; Bob Lokken, ProClarity; and Dan Hawkins, Bronco football.

Hewlett-Packard and Pixar Studios, among others, to talk about creativity at the annual Intermountain Venture Forum sponsored by the Boise Chamber of Commerce.

Hale, who grew up in Idaho and is a former San Francisco resident, says that creativity has helped several downtown areas, such as Oakland and Emeryville, Calif. He thinks that Boise's downtown should have an “intersection” of creativity, technology and entertainment to help stave off urban decay.

He has seen the creative community model work in the Silicon Valley, and says that downtown Boise has many of the same elements that make Silicon Valley work: venture capital firms, a university, a tech community and arts organizations.

The “chemistry is constantly changing” in Silicon Valley, he says, likening it to a band: people get together, click, play music, break up, and bring their new experiences to another band. That kind of creative networking builds up until, he says, you wind up with a multi-billion dollar company such as Google or Yahoo!

Boise State University can play a key part in the creative process, Hale says. It can act as an incubator, giving people the space and tools necessary to develop their ideas, as it does with its engineering research. The university also can help by building partnerships with other organizations.

“BSU needs to act on [President Bob]

Kustra's idea of a research institution," he says.

Charles Fee, producing artistic director of the Shakespeare Festival, says that the community, including the university, benefits from the presence of arts organizations such as his own.

"Many of our artists now make Idaho their year-round home, working with us and the Boise Contemporary Theater throughout the year, or teaching at local universities; that clearly impacts the creative index of Boise," he says.

Napier has been asked to contribute to a book about creativity and innovation that will be edited by professors from Stanford and Harvard. In the meantime, she, Hale and other people in city government and business and arts organizations will get together regularly to talk about how Boise can use what it has learned from other com-

munities and organizations. What works for, say, Seattle, might not work here.

"We have to have a different kind of approach, because we are so remote and so different from other creative communities," Napier says.

There is no grand plan for Boise's creative community. But there are plenty of discussions that fuel innovation: the Fettuccine Forum, which included a presentation by the Boise City Arts Commission's Julie Numbers-Smith in April about the importance of the arts in creative communities; the upcoming Chamber of Commerce meeting; and ongoing research and discussions, including the second annual creative economy workshop in early December, at Boise State.

"If we stand still, where will we be in 20 years? Standing still is dying, so we have to move," she says.

Alumni Profile



**P.I.s have
knack for
dirty laundry**

If your image of a private eye involves macho ex-detectives in tweed jackets, it's about to be shattered.

When you put Hanady Investigations under the magnifying glass, you will discover two savvy, middle-aged women who rely on a mother's instinct to help get the job done. They've built a successful Boise business, one that is perfectly tailored for two moms on the run.

Founder Valerie Agosta (BS, social science, '74; MBA, '78) worked mostly as a social worker after college and then stayed at home to raise her three children, one of whom is a semester away from earning her MBA at Boise State as well.

Five years ago, Agosta was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her sister, a breast cancer survivor, advised her to find something fun to get her mind off of being a cancer patient.

"I always wanted to be Nancy Drew or one of Charlie's Angels," Agosta says. After a simple licensing process, the two formed Hanady Investigations.

They passed the word among friends and neighbors, at church and at soccer games and before long business was building. Then, two years ago, both Agosta and her sister were diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time. Her sister's treatment was particularly grueling and she stepped away from the business.

Fortunately, Agosta and Mollie Carman crossed paths. Carman was a stay-at-home mom of four children who also dreamed of becoming a private investigator. The two had a great deal in common. Agosta hired Carman the day they met.

"I've always been very intuitive and knew I could do this," Carman says.

The two have secured steady work with attorneys and insurance companies, on child custody cases, adoption searches and a fair number of infidelity cases.

They put their families first and carefully select cases. They can do surveillance, drop their kids off at soccer practice and resume work on a case later that night.

"The fact that we are middle-aged moms makes us invisible," Agosta says. "We video tape and take pictures right in front of our subjects."

Both of their families occasionally help with surveillance and have been supportive of their venture. Agosta's husband, Jay Agosta, is a regional manager for a hardware cooperative and also has an MBA from Boise State. Carman's husband, Bill Carman, is a Boise State art professor.

"We all thought this was just a little hobby we would do for a while," Agosta says. But their business has grown enough to make it full-time work for both of them if they choose to work the hours. Down the road when their parenting responsibilities wane, they plan to run a full-fledged agency and hire additional investigators.

— Sherry Squires

Tools for Success

Boise State offers a variety of services and resources for Idaho's business and industry. They include the following:

Center for Professional Development — Administered by the Division of Extended Studies, the center consults with working professionals and their employers and offers education and training programs offered or developed by BSU. (208) 426-3485; <http://www.boisestate.edu/professionaldevelopment/>

Center for Workforce Training — Run by the Seland College of Applied Technology, the center offers short-term, employment-related training. (208) 426-1974; <http://workforce-training.boisestate.edu/>

Environmental Finance Center — The center, administered by the College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs, offers workshops, conferences, training seminars and formal education programs designed to help states and regulated entities that are required to comply with federal and state environmental protection laws. (208) 426-1567; <http://sspa.boisestate.edu/efc/>

Idaho Small Business Development Center — Administered by the BSU College of Business and Economics, the ISBDC is a wealth of free and low-cost information designed to educate and support Idaho small business owners and managers, inventors and potential entrepreneurs. (208) 426-1640; <http://idahosbdc.org>

Occupational Safety & Health Consultation Program — The program assists Idaho small businesses in complying with OSHA requirements. (208) 426-3283; <http://www2.boisestate.edu/OSHConsult/>

TECenter — Located on the Boise State-West campus in Nampa, the Technology and Entrepreneurial Center is the Treasure Valley's first technology incubator that helps startups and early stage technology companies. It offers clients real-time business assistance, development resources, common use areas and equipment, shared support services, affordable and flexible resident space and access to potential funding source. (208) 426-6612; <http://www.bsutecenter.com>

TechHelp — An affiliate of the national network of Manufacturing Extension Partnership Centers, TechHelp provides technical assistance, training, and information to strengthen the competitiveness of Idaho manufacturers, processors, and innovators through product and process improvements. (208) 426-3767; <http://www.techhelp.org>