

## Wine Galore, Hot Sauces, and More!



What do you truly enjoy, love to learn about, and would like to work with 7 days a week? Kimberly Eakin's answer was...wine. Eakin, owner of Wine Gourmet, writes, "I love people, I love the idea of hosting friends in an intimate atmosphere, and I love wine." She took what she loved and made it into a successful retail business with the help of the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center (RRSBDC).

It all started when Eakin was leaving active-duty Army service and was interested in working for herself. She weighed her talents and skills, and then rested on the idea of selling wine. She feels that, "wine is an ancient beverage and each bottle comes with a story." She wants to share those stories with others and felt that wine retail was the best way to do this. She finally decided to go for it in the fall of 2001 and incorporated in the same year. After researching and meeting with counselors at the RRSBDC, she fully opened Wine Gourmet in May 2002 in Botetourt County. She grew up in Botetourt and knew that the southern area was fast-growing and where she could be near her roots. She drew customers from all over the region and when she was ready to expand her space, she looked to Roanoke and the RRSBDC. After researching with an RRSBDC counselor, Eakin moved to the current Franklin Road location near Ukrop's. Wine Gourmet is a perfect partner for Ukrop's, a Virginia grocery store, which does not sell wine or beer. By moving to this location, she was also able to double the size of the shop and gained a seminar room for teaching wine classes.

Wine Gourmet is located at 2219 Franklin Road, Roanoke, Virginia, and is the only full-service wine and beer shop in the Roanoke Valley. The store offers fine wines, imported and micro brewed beers, wine-related gifts, and gourmet hot sauces. Personalized wine gift baskets and wine seminars are available as well.

Eakin received help throughout her business process including her new location choice, from the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center. When she first began researching the idea of starting a business she spotted the RRSBDC on the internet. Once she drafted a business plan, Eakin visited the RRSBDC for review and assistance before submitting it to local banks for funding. She says, "[The counselors] were my mentors and spent many hours assisting me." The counselors assisted her in securing a Small Business Administration guarantee which allowed her to obtain the funds needed to start

**Kimberly Eakin's tips for starting a small business:**

- Pick something you truly enjoy
- Conduct due diligence in research
- Plan on working half days (you will work the first 12 hours or the second 12 hours of each day and seven days a week)
- Try not to "eat out of your business" for the first year or so
- Enlist fellow local business owners for consults (you can waste a lot of time, money and energy without help)
- Remember, you may be serving a unique niche or introducing a new product, but you are not reinventing the wheel when it comes to running a business

Wine Gourmet. She revisited the counselors when she was looking to move and needed more space.

Franklin Road was a perfect location and when Eakin was ready to grow her business with what the store offered and marketing, she found FastTraining.org for business executive through the RRSBDC. Eakin writes,

Once my business was out of the start-up phase, I realized there were far fewer options for assistance and [I feel that] FastTraining.org with Lynda Foster and the RRSBDC is the key to my present-day success."

Wine Gourmet is a pride and joy of Eakin. She is not only proud of what her store has

become, but proud of her staff and what they bring to the table as well. "The staff at Wine Gourmet is truly the lifeblood of the business. Our employees are specifically trained to wait on each customer expertly with their upbeat attitude, depth of knowledge, and willingness to please," raves Eakin. She and her staff rely on countless hours of research along with sharp noses and taste buds to help in choosing from thousands of wines for the shop. They are particularly proud that half of the shop selections of fine wines are under \$15.00. Eakin says, "We like to think we specialize in fine wines under \$15.00 that actually taste good!"

Drop by Wine Gourmet, say hello to Kimberly, and pick out some of their perfectly priced wines with a little help from the very enjoyable staff. While you are in there, be sure to look over their "Green Wines" (wines made by organic means or by practicing organic means), wine related gifts, and their special collection of award-winning hot sauces.

For small business assistance like Kimberly Eakin received, contact the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center by calling 540.983.0717, emailing [sbdc@roanokechamber.org](mailto:sbdc@roanokechamber.org), or visiting [www.rrsbdc.org](http://www.rrsbdc.org).