

Center for Rural Affairs 2010 Entrepreneur Award

Connie Harvey, Efficiency Counts, Hastings, NE

Connie Harvey was employed at a local bank in McCook, Nebraska. She recognized the bank's small business customers needed help setting up their accounts. Connie acquired an accounting degree from Mid-Plains Community College and started Efficiency Counts in the back of a computer store in 2004.

In 2007, she and her husband Larry moved to Hastings, where Larry serves as Pastor of First Baptist Church. Connie opened the doors to Efficiency Counts in a small office near downtown Hastings in April 2008. Accounting Support, Customized Databases and Software Training services are provided to clients within 150 miles of Hastings. The business has grown steadily over the last 6 ½ years in customer base, income and recognition.

REAP networking and the MarketPlace conference have been tremendously valuable. Two grants helped Connie to upgrade technology resources and to create a "Bookkeeping Basics for Business Success" curriculum. Most recently, Efficiency Counts contracted with REAP to help small businesses statewide to set up or correct their bookkeeping systems. Connie recently moved the business to a larger office in her building and hired two new employees.



Connie Harvey receiving her award from Jeff Reynolds, Center for Rural Affairs' REAP Program Director.

REAP Women's Business Center Entrepreneur of the Year 2010

Norma Avalos, Taqueria Max, Lexington, NE

Norma Avalos owns Taqueria Max in Lexington, Nebraska. She has years of experience in cooking and decided to open her business in 2003. Taqueria Max offers authentic Mexican food including quesadillas, gorditas and sopes along with other traditional meals.

In 2008, Norma attended the REAP Women's Business Center Business Plan Basics training in Lexington and also received technical assistance from REAP Hispanic Business Specialist Nancy Flock. Norma is a member of the Roundtable Group Centro de Negocios Lexington, where she continues to receive ongoing training.

A REAP loan has helped with working capital to expand the restaurant and allow more seating. The whole family works together to operate the business, and the REAP loan helps in managing the cash flow and improving their opportunity to operate with a profit.



Norma Avalos, owner of Taqueria Max, receiving her award from Nancy Flock, REAP Hispanic Business Specialist.

REAP Hispanic Business Center Entrepreneur of the Year 2010 Edgar Gutierrez, Edgar's Japanese Auto Repair, Lexington, NE

Edgar's Japanese Auto Repair opened in Lexington, Nebraska in May of 2002. Prior to that, Edgar Gutierrez ran his business for 12 years in the Los Angeles area. He and his wife decided to move to Nebraska to give their children and themselves more opportunities than the metropolitan area offered.

Edgar's specialty is providing an affordable Japanese Auto Repair service. Business was steady and growing until 2008, when the building was completely destroyed by a fire. While some might have given up on their business in such an event, the Gutierrez's were determined to get going again.

Slowly, Edgar rebuilt the shop, and it reopened in the spring of 2010. Customers are returning and he is attracting new ones. With his building experience, Edgar has also launched a construction business within his existing shop. The Gutierrez's plan to build larger customer bases in both businesses. As business grows they also plan to hire two to three employees.



Edgar receiving Center for Rural Affairs' REAP Hispanic Business Center Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Standing next to him is Juan Sandoval, REAP Hispanic Business Center Director for the Center for Rural Affairs.

REAP Friend of the Year 2010 University of Nebraska at Kearney College of Business and Technology, Kearney, NE



Dr. Timothy Burkink, Dean of the College of Business and Technology at UNK accepts the REAP Friend of the Year award from Dena Beck, Center for Rural Affairs' REAP Business Specialist.

Financial literacy with elementary school students, statistical analysis by college students, market research for individual small businesses, and volunteer help with conferences and projects, these are but a few of the things the College has done with REAP.

The Center for Enterprise Education (Mary Rittenhouse), Minden Exchange Bank and First Bank & Trust of Minden partnered with REAP on Financial Literacy activities at East Elementary school in Minden. This activity won an award with the Nebraska Education Association.

A UNK Statistics Class (Dr. Michelle Fleig-Palmer) reviewed and analyzed data from the 2008 REAP Small Business Needs Assessment study. A 200-level stats class reviewed the raw data from the 2010 study and presented their results. The Center for Rural Research & Development (CRRD) Advisory Council (Shawn Kaskie) provides market research to REAP clients.

The Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) Team (Shawn Kaskie) assisted with our MarketPlace event. The SIFE team is also working with the Center for Rural Affairs on a project with Cody Kilgore High School students on a student-run grocery store for the community.