Business startups rising in region, Wisconsin

By Liam Marlaire
Leader-Telegram staff

Considering the turbulent economy and facing a fifth year of college, Gillian Mackenzie Holsinger decided it was time to step up and start her own business.

Mackenzie Holsinger's interest in photography began nearly 10 years ago. She's since photographed nearly 45 high school seniors in the Chippewa Valley and Minnesota, shot several weddings, and conducted numerous family, maternity and children's shoots.

This past Christmas, her boyfriend's gift to her was a check for the exact amount it takes to register a limited liability company in Wisconsin. The result was Gillian Mackenzie Photography LLC.

"I love photography, and I realized that this was a great opportunity that I had already — somewhat unknowingly — set up a foundation for," said Mackenzie Holsinger, a UW-Stout senior.

She is not alone. The number of new businesses formed in the state rose 2.3 percent last year, the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions reported this week. They totaled 33,190 in 2011 compared with 32,458 in 2010.

Tom Bauer, chairman of Western Wisconsin SCORE, said many entrepreneurs register as LLCs because the process is relatively easy and inexpensive. Other options can be more troublesome.

"Setting up a business as a partnership can be potential problem for some entrepreneurs as they have a hard time anticipating that the person or persons they are starting a business with may have different goals and objectives from their own," Bauer said. "Frequently, they should seek legal counsel for a partnership.

"Most of our clients are starting small and don't consider incorporating. Setting up a corporation is more complicated, and we advise clients to seek the assistance of their attorney."

Mackenzie Holsinger's registration with the state was one of 49 entered from the Eau Claire area from Dec. 2 to Dec. 29. The Leader-Telegram periodically prints the registrations, and last month's total was significantly higher than the norm.
The reasons for registering vary. Aaron Seeman registered Seeman & Saykally Accounting Services in December as a step in succession planning as his father nears retirement. Seeman & Saykally and Seeman Tax & Financial are housed at 535 Fairfax St. in Altoona.

Dan Coleman of Chippewa Falls and Grant Wood of Florida, an Eau Claire native, last month registered Flaunt Your Tees, a venture that offers a line of "college life" T-shirts with an emphasis on humor and pop culture. Although sales predominantly are online, Cherry Pickers in Oakwood Mall carries the product.

For Mackenzie Holsinger, it was to further her goal of offering a service she sees as unique in the region. She studied photography at Minnesota State University Moorhead before transferring to UW-Stout in Menomonie, where she is a graphic design major.

"I realized that high school seniors are at such an interesting point in their lives — not still kids, not yet adults — and I love capturing their unique and fun personalities with equally unique and fun portraits," she said. "I was sick of seeing the typical cookie-cutter yearbook portrait."

Regardless of whether the uptick of business registrations is dominated by new ventures, retooling companies or established businesses, hopefully all their ledgers will stay in the black as they expand their products, services and, maybe one day, payrolls.

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