Success Story

Vamos! Lion Chariot
Giving Happy Valley a Reason to Smile!

Project Background:

Todd Miner had worked at the Meteorology department at Penn State University for many years, producing the weather page for the New York Times. When the contract to do that page went to a private firm, he found himself out of work. The job market was soft, so he decided that it might be the right time to become an entrepreneur.

During a visit to San Diego, he had the opportunity to ride in one of the hundreds of three-wheeled human-powered “pedicabs” found on the streets and sidewalks of the city. He enjoyed the ride very much, and felt that students, residents, and visitors of the State College area would appreciate this same service. He started to research the industry, found a pedicab supplier, and started to move forward with his plan.

SBDC Assistance:

In late 2010, Todd first found out about the Small Business Development Center at Penn State when he saw a notice in the employee Newswire announcing a special session of the SBDC’s First Step of Starting a Small Business workshop being offered to faculty and staff. He attended the workshop, and followed up by attending the Second Step workshop, to obtain the knowledge that he needed to pull together a business plan.

Over the next fifteen months, Todd would reach out to the SBDC many times, asking for input on legal and tax issues, pulling together financial projections, and discussing marketing ideas. By early 2012, Todd felt that he had addressed all issues and concerns that he needed to, and placed an order for his first pedicab.

Outcome:

Vamos! Lion Chariot started taking ‘fares’ in April of 2012. Todd initially focused on rides in the Downtown State College, University Park Campus, and the surrounding residential areas. One of his first weekends on the job was the annual Blue-White scrimmage football game, when thousands of visitors come into town. The weather was beautiful and Todd was able to give many guests rides around campus.

The initial response was so overwhelming that Todd ordered two more pedicabs, and started to line up additional drivers. As Penn State students returned to campus for the Fall Semester in August, Vamos! Lion Chariot found itself with a steady stream of riders wanting to crisscross all over State College and Campus.

Todd’s service isn’t meant to compete with the traditional taxi and bus services already in the area. He positions his service as an economical, fun, and ‘green’ alternative. His clever use of facebook keeps his frequent customers in touch with when he is on duty and where he is at any given time. His fares have been all ages, and from across the nation and around the globe. If you see Todd on the street, shouted out “Vamos!” from the curb to take a ride!