

Small Business Development Center at UCF



Motorsports ConneXtions



MOTORSPORTS CONNEXTIONS' Lisa Knowles with SBDC Counselor Gene Romagna.

If you think high gas prices, environmental impacts, cautious consumer spending and old friends separated by nearly 6000 miles are business obstacles, then you should talk to Lisa Knowles, CEO of MotorSports ConneXtions, a new importer-distributor of motor scooters in Clermont, Florida.

"I've had this friend in Hawaii for the past 20 years," says Knowles, "and we discussed many times about going into business but the timing just wasn't right." That all changed in July 2008, when Lisa, her husband Russ, and their friend Joe in Hawaii, pooled their limited resources to put a deposit on a ship container full of motor scooters - some 44 bikes in total. That's when Knowles contacted the SBDC at UCF's Gene Romagna, area manager for Lake & Sumter Counties. "She was one determined professional", Romagna recalls, "and she wanted to 'do it right' from the start." Knowles immediately started in on a business plan and what the proper legal structure would be for the company. "We weren't sure how we were going to sell the product as it seemed difficult, so I discussed our options with Gene. With his (Romagna's) help, getting his input and his direction to various web sites to research as to what was best for us, we settled on being a distributor." They filed with the State for a distributorship in late November, the scooter shipment arrived Thanksgiving weekend.

Determined to make it work, Knowles continued to work with customs brokers and trucking companies to successfully get the products to their rented storage facility. There were also other necessary items to complete including working with state offices for a distributor license, drumming up potential dealers, creating contracts and advertising pieces, and getting a harder than expected "MCO" (manufacturer certificate of origin) document. By early February 2009, MotorSports ConneXtions received their approved license to distribute motor vehicles in the State of Florida and have six dealers with more on the way.

"Gene was always there by phone and email to help lead us in the directions we needed to go, including working with the state and the folks in Tallahassee," says Knowles. "You just knew this was going to work from the start," says Romagna. "Success was the only option for her positive attitude and hard work." MotorSports ConneXtions recently co-opted with a dealer to run a TV commercial that will be airing in the greater Lake County area over the next few weeks. Additionally, Knowles is looking to bring on another manufacturer with 3 more scooters styles along with after-market parts. So, keep your eyes and ears open when driving in central Florida. You just may catch Lisa Knowles "scootering" to one of her dealers.

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Lisa Knowles,
MotorSports ConneXtions