

Small Business Development Center at UCF



amaZulu, Inc.



AMAZULU'S Claire Evans with SBDC consultant Gene Romagna.

Born in Zimbabwe and raised in South Africa, when Claire Evans decided to pursue her dreams by opening a company in Clermont, FL, in 2002, the name “amaZulu” seemed only “natural”. With a brilliant and contagious smile Claire will tell you it is a Zulu dialect that means “people of heaven”. Under that name she developed a natural architectural company that would introduce and develop new innovations and sustain higher service standards in the industry by supplying of natural and faux materials such as thatch, bamboo, reeds, etc., and the innovative installation specialists to go with it all.

When Claire Evans contacted local SBDC counselor, Gene Romagna CBA, it was May of 2008. “I remember the three key things about meeting Ms. Evans”, recalls Gene. “She energetic, organized and faced a big supplier problem.” At the time amaZulu, Inc, had five employees and a successful track record of becoming a key supplier for such notable companies as Disney, Sea World, and Outback Steak House. But as Claire will explain, “the industry was ready for more environmentally safe and longer lasting fire proof synthetic materials, but getting the quality is becoming almost impossible.”

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Claire Evans,
amaZulu, Inc.

It was trying to sort through that business development process and how to create business agreements that caused her to call Gene at the Clermont SBDC. Working together over the course of the next year, Claire gained the clarity needed to face various obstacles and several attempted solutions to getting a quality product on a reliable basis. Finally, by the summer she was ready to take her plan – which now included working with a manufacturer in Canada - to seek financing. “We needed a half million dollars, but just couldn’t get a bank (she had been to 3) to take us seriously.” Looking at the plans and the financials, Gene suggested that she approach a local lender who he knew to be supportive of small businesses like amaZulu, Inc. The introduction to BankFIRST (the regional office is an active member of the SBDC’s Small Business Resource Network in Central Florida) was just what was needed. “Gene helped me get through all of the fluff and get back to the basics”, says Claire. “It was her dogged persistence and belief in her directions that won out in the end” Gene will say; “she deserves the \$500K loan for sure.” It is fitting that at the bottom of every email from Claire is this Thomas Edison quote “Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time”. So the next time you enjoy a little bit of “paradise” at an exotic attractions like a theme park, zoo, aquarium, spa, restaurant, resort, camping facilities, retreat or even high end real estate, you just may be experiencing some of amaZulu’s unique creations.

Helping Businesses Start, Grow and Succeed