



CORKS, COOKS & BOOKS

Rock Hill Area SBDC Client
Woman-Owned Business

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A Fusion of Talents

Opening a wine bar and bookstore was always a shared dream of friends Mindy Kuhn and Shonali Thomas—it just took them a few years to realize it. The two met in 2017 when Warren Publishing, Kuhn's company, published Thomas' cookbook. They became close friends—and inevitably, business partners. Seizing upon Kuhn's knowledge of books and desire to add a retail aspect to her publishing company, and Thomas' zeal for cooking and vision to expand her catering firm, SplenDishes Kitchen, the pair conceived Corks, Cooks & Books, a bookstore, retail shop and wine bar in Rock Hill, SC.

Industry: Food & Beverage, Retail

Initial Challenge: Clients needed assistance with launching their business: developing a business plan, obtaining financing and site leasing.

Approach: The consultant explained bank financing requirements, specifically owner equity/collateral and walked the clients through the steps of starting a business.

Results:

- New Business Started
- Financing Obtained: \$50,000
- Annual Sales Increase: \$1.2 million
- Jobs Created: 2 full-time

Even with their combined, extensive business experience, however, Kuhn and Thomas realized that opening a new business during a global pandemic would be no easy feat. Fortunately, they attended a “Let’s Get Started” workshop where, after learning about the SC SBDC’s services, they scheduled an appointment with Winthrop Region Director and experienced business consultant Tom George.

Eager to help the two friends fuse their independent ventures into something bigger and wholly unique, George met with Kuhn and Thomas in January 2021. He began by walking them step-by-step through the business startup checklist while simultaneously helping them understand and comply with changing COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Although Corks, Cooks & Books was an established LLC by the beginning of 2021, Kuhn and Thomas needed to obtain a substantial sum of working capital to grow the businesses into what they had envisioned. So, George first helped Kuhn and Thomas compile an impressive business plan and then connected the women with several funding options, including local banks, grants and outside investors. Thanks to George's assistance, Kuhn and Thomas were able to obtain a \$50,000 commercial loan from Catawba bank.

Since its official opening, Corks, Cooks & Books has been well-received by the Rock Hill community. Customers say they love the funky merchandise and enjoy sharing a glass of wine with friends in the shop’s low-key atmosphere. Constantly seeking ways to make their business even more distinctive, Kuhn and Thomas have begun hosting special events and are making ongoing revisions to menu offerings. Most recently, the ambitious pair contacted George for his assistance with marketing and promotions.

Services Provided:

- > Business Startup Assistance
- > Business Plan Development
- > Financial Projections
- > Loan Application Preparation

“ I’m so thankful that the SC SBDC believed in us. Our consultant Tom George was very supportive and answered any question we had. He was the first person who didn’t say ‘no’ to our idea.

Mindy Kuhn, Co-Owner
Corks, Cooks & Books

