

Post-Standard Sunday, January 15, 2012

Proposed state program gets its inspiration from Start-Up NY

Teri Weaver – Albany Notebook

A Syracuse-based program helping entrepreneurs who are disabled may become a model for a statewide program, according to legislation introduced by a New York City senator.

Senator Martin Golden, R-Brooklyn, wants to use Start-Up NY as a roadmap to help people with disabilities become entrepreneurs and help others find jobs, according to legislation he introduced this month.

In New York, about 11 percent of adults are disabled, yet only one in three have jobs according to the bill from Golden, a former New York City police officer who retired after being injured on the job.

Start-Up NY, run out of the South Side Innovation Center, works to change those odds.

“We have a marginalized group that people forget about,” said Bob Herz, director of the center who runs Start-Up NY with help from Syracuse University’s Burton Blatt Institute and a federal grant obtained by Onondaga County.

Since 2008, about 300 people with physical or developmental disabilities have gone to the Syracuse center for help starting a business, Herz said. Generally, they go through a class that helps them transform an idea into a business plan and potential financing. Most receive legal help setting up their business and mentoring services as the company launches.

About 75 people who have gone through the program have formed companies, and 55 are still in business, Herz said.

The program costs about \$100,000 a year to run, not counting overhead and some staff costs.

Golden’s bill calls for creating a pilot program, run through an existing state council that works with disabled people, to explore ways to create more formal assistance for future entrepreneurs.

The bill does not specify how much the pilot program – nor an actual full-fledged program – would cost the state.

Herz said he was thrilled the center was mentioned in the legislation. He said with Gov. Andrew Cuomo's emphasis on putting people to work, the legislation might have a shot in Albany.

"It's about trying to create more jobs," he said.