



## NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Anthony Adornato  
Director of Communications  
(315) 443-6173/[acadorna@law.syr.edu](mailto:acadorna@law.syr.edu)

### **Entrepreneurs with disabilities launch nearly 50 businesses in Onondaga County**

*Start-Up NY/Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ results in self-employment for residents with disabilities*

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK – Armed with the knowledge and skills she acquired through Start-Up NY and a range of entrepreneurship resources she received as part of Syracuse University’s Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ initiative, Della Brown, a Syracuse native, has transformed her business ideas into reality.

“Starting my own eatery would not have been possible if it were not for the Start-Up NY program,” noted Brown, who recently opened Tacolicious in downtown Syracuse. “It has not only given me invaluable skills, but also the opportunity to improve the quality of my life.”

Brown isn’t alone in achieving her dream. Start-Up NY – an innovative partnership between the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University, the Whitman School of Management through its South Side Innovation Center (SSIC), and Onondaga County – has assisted dozens of budding entrepreneurs with diverse disabilities in Onondaga County gain access to business development resources to help them launch and grow successful business ventures.

Since 2007, the program has served 204 individuals with disabilities, resulting in 48 of the entrepreneurs starting businesses, from a car repair garage to a dog grooming and day care service. Start-Up NY has expanded over the past three years to become a model for “Inclusive Entrepreneurship”™ that works with partners to leverage financial resources and access to financial literacy and benefits planning. The model also includes teaching and guiding college students who work with entrepreneurs with disabilities as business development consultants, a component of a new jointly-taught Whitman School and BBI course.

“We know that people with disabilities can become successful small business owners given the opportunity, training, and resources. BBI, the Whitman School, and its community partners, including Onondaga County Department of Social Services, the Onondaga Small Business Development Center, CNY Works, Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, and others are proving that a collaborative entrepreneurship development model can work for people with disabilities,” said Gary Shaheen, BBI Senior Vice President.

BBI managed the design and implementation of Start-Up NY on behalf of Onondaga County, led by the County Department of Social Services. The project is headquartered in the South Side Innovation Center in Syracuse, and takes advantage of the inter-related services and facilities there. SSIC and Whitman conceive of their work as creating entrepreneurs with training, services, access to credit, and access to a tremendous group of collaborators, explained Thomas Kruczek, director of the Falcone Center, who oversees the project for the Whitman School.

“This is what we do,” Kruczek said. “We work with everyone who has an interest and a passion, and we have special programs targeted to their needs. Our purpose and our core belief is that entrepreneurship affirms dignity and establishes the ability of any person to attain economic control over his or her life.”

“Onondaga County was honored to partner with Syracuse University in this project,” said County Executive Joanne Mahoney. “The work accomplished by the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University reinforces our belief that with the correct supports all citizens can find their rightful place in our county’s economic fabric.”

The program not only makes self-employment a viable option for people with disabilities – a particularly important endeavor considering unemployment among people with disabilities is estimated at 65-90% percent nationwide and countywide, but also has a positive impact on the local economy.

“When people with disabilities earn money as small business owners, they can reduce their reliance on public assistance, increase their standard of living and self-esteem, and contribute to the business and economic growth in Onondaga County,” noted Shaheen.

Start-Up NY provides participants with business plan development and review, benefits planning assistance, financing consultation, and training programs, among other resources. “One of the most beneficial aspects of the program,” said Brown, “was having a business navigator coach, someone who worked with me one-on-one throughout the process.

Start-Up NY was funded by a three-year, \$3 million grant to Onondaga County from the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy. The program has been so successful that BBI is now working with its community partners to replicate the model in other locations.

“Syracuse University and its partners are currently replicating the Inclusive Entrepreneurship <sup>tm</sup> model in Manhattan, and it is being used as a model for similar initiatives throughout New York State and even internationally,” added Shaheen.

## **More about Start-Up NY**

- The Inclusive Entrepreneurship <sup>TM</sup> curriculum includes four stages to build a successful business: discovery process, business planning, execution, and growth and sustainability.
- Thanks to a \$16,000 grant, the Kauffman Foundation jump-started Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) for entrepreneurs through Syracuse Cooperative Federal Credit Union. After that, the Gifford Foundation Matched Savings Program for Entrepreneurs provided \$1,000 each to 35 individuals. The matched savings accounts have a 1:1 match up to \$1,000. Therefore, when a participant saved \$1,000, they received an additional \$1,000. Today, Onondaga County has 51 slots for such IDAs, the largest number on record of IDAs for people with disabilities in one community.
- For more information, visit <http://www.startupny.org>.

## **About the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University**

BBI is dedicated to practical inclusive solutions for people with disabilities worldwide. With a staff of more than 60 and offices in Syracuse, NY, Washington, DC, Atlanta, GA, New York, NY, Los Angeles, CA, and Tel Aviv, Israel, BBI engages in projects on civil rights, entrepreneurship, universal design, employment and economic advancement, technology innovation, and attitudes about disability in traditional and new media. For more information, visit <http://bbi.syr.edu>.

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