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## Grow It Project Helping New Mexico One Business at a Time

*By William Fulginiti, Executive Director, New Mexico Municipal League*

Robin Hartrow, partner in the Alamogordo nonprofit spay-neuter clinic All About the Animals, didn't have time before opening her business last October to look carefully through a "welcome packet" of information she received while registering her business at City Hall.



By the time she caught her breath and reviewed the material — prepared by Finance New Mexico in partnership with the New Mexico Municipal League — she was pleasantly surprised to learn of the many free and low-cost resources available to business owners in New Mexico.

"It's crazy all the stuff we didn't know," Hartrow admitted during a recent break between clients. "We got the idea and hit the ground running, and things kept popping up that we didn't anticipate."

The welcome packet — part of the Municipal League's "Business — Let's Grow It Together" project — includes materials on how to get a business off the ground and where to find information about choosing a legal structure and obtaining a federal tax ID, gross receipts tax number and necessary permits and licenses. One document lists contact information for dozens of organizations that exist to help business owners with technical assistance, advice, industry expertise and financing.

Hartrow and business partner Dawn Sage did a lot of the groundwork for their business before registering and picking up the Grow It packet. They rounded up four veterinarians who shared their goal of cutting euthanasia rates by reducing the population of homeless animals, found a facility and equipment, and secured all the permits required to provide spay and neuter services.

A lot they learned the hard way, as many business owners do. But as the business evolves, Hartrow said, "things will still come up, so we'll keep this information close at hand. Grant information will be most helpful."

John Haynes owns another animal-oriented Alamogordo business — a for-profit venture called Darkside Serpents. The business opened last fall as a limited liability company co-owned by Haynes and two friends who agreed the town needed a one-stop shop for people who keep

reptiles, amphibians and arachnids and need supplies and food for their exotic pets.

“We want to [provide] good-quality animals — healthy animals and to teach people to be responsible pet owners,” Haynes said. “We’re just trying to be a legitimate, good reptile store.”

Unlike a lot of people who start small businesses, Haynes spent three years developing his business model. He did his own homework to find out what permits he needed and got startup funding from his partners and relatives.

Moving forward, he said, the packet “will probably help us,” especially if the packet is updated regularly to include lists of professional services essential to businesses, such as accountants and legal services. Even so, Haynes said, “There’s more than enough useful stuff” to help a new business get off the ground.

The Municipal League initiated the Grow It program to encourage economic development and to demonstrate to business owners how cities can serve them. Business success is critical to cities large and small, because tax-paying businesses provide jobs and generate revenue that funds public services that improve communities and keep residents safe.

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