



Symbiotic Success: Incubator and Its Tenant Companies Grow Together

By Finance New Mexico

When Allan Sindelar joined the Santa Fe Business Incubator in 1998, both his company — Positive Energy Solar — and the incubator were in their infancy.

Sindelar had previously made his living as a freelance carpenter and had several years' experience designing and installing solar electrical systems. He had no background in starting and running a business.

The incubator, meanwhile, had just opened in a 10,000-square-foot building with barely enough room for eight or nine tenant businesses. Its founder, Marie Longserre, aimed to make it an environment that nurtured entrepreneurial impulses and connected startup owners with essential resources and training.

As the incubator's second tenant, Sindelar's success and that of the incubator evolved in tandem.

Positive Energy, which graduated from the incubator in 2005, reported revenues of nearly \$10 million last year and expects to double that this year. The award-winning company has 55 employees in three statewide offices.

In that same time, the incubator has tripled its square footage and helped launch more than 140 businesses, said Longserre, its president and chief executive officer. "We have grown physically, in our reach, our offerings and our affiliations."

Because the incubator funneled much information and resources his way from multiple sources, Sindelar can't identify every organization that contributed to his success. But some stand out in his memory.

From Los Alamos National Laboratory's Technology Commercialization Office in 2001, he received assistance securing a patent for an invention he hoped to commercialize. A class in lean manufacturing from New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership helped him understand how he could produce that invention most efficiently.



While “we never developed and marketed the product on a large scale,” Sindelar said, his company is turning to New Mexico MEP again for training in value stream mapping in hopes of cutting service costs by 20 percent.

In 2004, Sindelar approached the renewable energy program director at San Juan College in Farmington with an offer to sell part of the company and instead found two people with valuable management experience who wanted to buy in as partners. Ten years into that partnership, Positive Energy is now a Certified B Corporation — a status that signifies its willingness to hold itself to high standards of social and environmental responsibility, accountability and transparency.

The incubator also fostered intangible kinds of support, including emotional encouragement in 1999 when Sindelar was ready to quit after his wife was diagnosed with a serious illness.

“Allan worked very hard, always held to his personal principles in his business and customer service and sought advice readily,” Longserre said. “He had a vision that he saw through, rode through the ups and downs of any startup and many other challenges life threw his way with candor and grace and came up with what I consider the single best name for a small business in the alternative energy sector. I learned as much from watching him as he learned from anything we may have taught him.”

For more information about the Santa Fe Business Incubator, call (505) 424-1140 or visit www.sfbi.net.

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