

## News Release

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### **M.B.A. students help local small businesses grow**

**KOKOMO, Ind.** — Jennifer Rozzi made a crucial decision about the future of her family business, with help from Indiana University Kokomo students.

As vice president and co-owner of Rozzi’s Catering, which her parents started as a neighborhood grocery store more than 35 years ago, she had to determine the company’s future direction.

Rozzi enlisted the help of IU Kokomo’s Master of Business Administration students to analyze all her options, which included building or buying a banquet hall, developing products for mass-market sales, or opening a restaurant. She used the analysis to build a business plan, which helped her get approval from her bank to buy the Continental Ballroom in Kokomo.

“The students determined that was the best plan, and it turned out to be the right decision,” she said. “Adding the Continental Ballroom gave us exposure to the community, which helped us maintain our business through the economic slump.”

She now recommends the free program to other area entrepreneurs.

“This is what our community needs to stay on top of economic development, to encourage growth and bring in a new generation of business-minded people and keep them here,” Rozzi said. “We need to connect them with the community and connect the community with them. It’s a brilliant program, and it will help the area as it moves forward.”

Rozzi said the students she worked with brought new perspective to the business, along with five years of financial projections.

“As they take a look at your business, they see possibilities that maybe you don’t see while you’re in the midst of your business. I think that helps you to move forward.”

Launa Bills, who earned her M.B.A. in May, found working with a local business gave her a chance not only to build on her areas of strength, but also to learn from classmates and their expertise.

“I had no previous business experience. All I had was book learning. This was a chance to use what I had learned in real life, to see how things work with an actual business,” Bills said. “I could bring my own strengths to the project, and gain experience in areas where I needed to learn more.”

Steve Cox, professor of finance, said the program reflects the current trend of business students having hands-on learning opportunities, and it benefits both the businesses helped and the students doing the work.

“By working with a business, students enhance their technical and personal skill sets, and they also build business contacts in the community,” he said. “This will be a welcome addition to the students’ résumés. The community benefits as businesses and not-for-profit organizations reap the benefits of the students’ work.”

The M.B.A. program is accepting applications from established businesses and start ups, entrepreneurs, and governmental and non-profit agencies, to provide teams of students to help transform the region’s economy.

Gloria Preece, program director, said the project is now a required element of the MBA program. Faculty members will support the student teams through the projects, which may be completed during multiple semesters.

She said the program fits with Chancellor Michael Harris’ campus themes of Academic Excellence and Student Success, Building Relationships and Making Friends, and Transforming the Region.

“We feel this is a great way to share our resources with the community,” she said. “Our students also benefit, by using the skills they’ve learned in the classroom in a real-life situation.”

Monty Henderson, business advisor at the Hoosier Heartland Small Business Development Center, is excited about the venture, saying it benefits both the small businesses and the students.

“The students are usually pretty eager to prove themselves and work in a real business. It’s rewarding to the owners because they have someone look at their business from an outside point of view. It is a win for both sides.”

Preece invites business owners to call her at 765-455-9269 or e-mail [gpreece@iuk.edu](mailto:gpreece@iuk.edu) for information to participate in the M.B.A. program.

*Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.*  
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