

## Getting some help from the pros

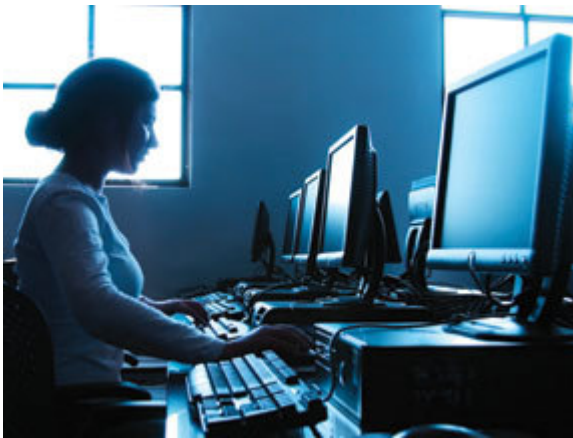
*By Jill Von Wedel*

### Women's Business Centers offer assistance for new and seasoned entrepreneurs

Sometimes, women business owners just need a little help.

The Women's Business Center (WBC) program was founded by the U.S. Small Business Administration to help women entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses with counseling and training courses. There are currently 80 such centers throughout the country, with \$12 million in grant money to go toward opening 19 more centers.

The Edge Connection - which partners with Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University -- is one of two Atlanta-area WBCs.



"The WBC program was created to address the issue of women and successful businesses across the country," says program director **B. Janine Anthony**. "We work with clients who want to move to economic self-sufficiency."

Formerly called the Cobb Microenterprise Center, The Edge Connection was established nine years ago. "It was developed from a community collaborative where four different entities came together and wanted to address the lack of microenterprise support in the community," **Anthony** says. Kennesaw State University, the Center for Family Resources, the YWCA of Northwest Georgia and the United Way of Cobb all joined forces in the effort.

Among the courses offered are business planning, technical assistance and sales and marketing training. The biggest course is Plan for Success, a 12-week class which culminates in students giving a sales presentation and writing a business plan. "It's our bread and butter course," **Anthony** says. "We usually graduate around 80 people from it at the end of the year."

While some of the courses are free, others do require a fee based on a sliding scale. "Because we're a WBC, often what we do can be subsidized to some extent," **Anthony** says. "The scale is based on HUD guidelines."

One of the biggest features of the courses is that they offer real-world experience from business professionals.

"One of the best things would probably be the network of individuals behind the program, and hearing the stories of people doing the same thing as me," says Monique Wilson, owner of Monique Marketing and an Edge Connection participant. "It was very motivational for me to see people who were in the same situation."

Hearing real-world stories, according to **Anthony**, will give students an edge in the business world. "Successful business owners sharing their stories will show students that reality meets theory," she says. "There's nothing like having the opportunity to spend time with someone who does this day to day and tell you how it really works."

After a hiatus from her business to go to school for her MBA, Wilson went back to The Edge Connection for a little counseling on how to grow her marketing firm to new heights. "The key now is to have them help me how to figure out if there's a next level, if I can get there and provide the assistance I need," she says. "It's been a great resource for me to connect and for someone with experience to help me grow my business in ways I wouldn't have been able to."

Wilson wants to help spread the word about the business center for others like herself. "A lot of people don't know the resource is there," she says. "If more people knew it was available across the board, it would be helpful for people who need the resources."