



Need a Space in Which to Grow Your Business?

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BY RONNI WILDE — CBN REPORTER ON DECEMBER 3, 2019 BUSINESS & INDUSTRY, BUSINESS PROFILES, E-HEADLINES
(Dana Black | Photo by Lolly Nelson)

There is a distinct entrepreneurial spirit in Bend. Lots of folks move here and start up a product-based business to bring creativity to life, earn a living and support the active lifestyle that Central Oregon has to offer. Initially, working from home or a small office space is great, but eventually, if a company is successful, the business can take over and the dedicated space begins to bust at the seams, consuming needed living and work areas.

As a professional consultant, Dana Black has begun to see this all too often. “I consult with small businesses that are product-based here in Bend. Many have grown out of their space; garages are overflowing, and dining tables have become packaging areas. Families want their home back,” she said. “I was working with a client whose office was across from the master bedroom, and her husband was home sick. He came out in his underwear, not realizing that the wife’s employee was there.”

This sparked an idea in Black: What if some of these smaller product companies could share space and resources? Time and money could be saved, and the companies could benefit from pooling resources. With this brainstorm, Collective Pallet was born. “I’m looking to be that space for the

business that's too big for the owner's home or current office, but not quite big enough yet to maintain a warehouse or to move to a third-party logistics company that charges per-item fees to store, pack and ship a product," she said.

The concept behind Collective Pallet is that the owner of a small business can store their product, pick it off the shelf, custom package it, go to a shipping station to print out labels and then have the product ship out from there. "There are parts and pieces in operations that can be simplified every day. If you are working on all the little details, you aren't out there selling your product and working on your business," said Black. "In some cases, people are running back and forth between an office space and home to pick up a product, wait for a delivery or schedule a pickup. Let me take care of that so you can focus on growing your company."

Black, who moved to Bend in 1996 with her husband and raised their daughters here, has owned several businesses in town and was formerly a professional organizer. "I literally helped people get physically organized in their houses and their businesses, and during that time, we started Christy Designs, where we made organizing products." From there, she and her then-business partner started Simply Baked, a baking and serving product line, and after that, she worked for Sudara, a Bend-based maker of lounge and sleepwear products. Upon leaving Sudara, she became an independent consultant.

Her experience on both the organizational and production ends of business provides the background to understand the needs of a company, and the benefits behind the idea of shared resources and space. "This is not a fulfillment center concept," she explained. "This is about the nuts and bolts of conducting business and helping them shave off time from their day. There are lots of simple solutions to help." If needed, Black is available to provide consulting services, and she hopes to develop relationships with each of the business owners who will be her customers.

Collective Pallet will be a month-to-month membership, with the membership cost based upon a combination of storage space used and the number of monthly shipments made, which can change monthly based on the needs of the company. A business will be able to come in and lease space to store a product and enjoy the benefits of volume discounts. Black will maintain the warehouse space, all the equipment in the space and will make sure ample shipping supplies — such as boxes and labels — are always on hand. The facility can serve as a business address for the members, which affords lower shipping rates than mailing from a residential address. With daily pickups by carriers such as UPS and Fed Ex, clients will save money by not having to schedule special pickups. She also

plans to have a walk-behind forklift to pull products off a delivery truck so that business owners don't have to pay for a truck with a lift gate.

For those who need to conduct bulk assembly and packaging, Collective Pallet will be available to rent afterhours at an hourly rate. "They can bring in staff, or we can find staff for them," said Black. And for business owners who go on vacation or need to be out of town for any length of time, Black's crew can fulfill orders and receive products on their behalf while they are away.

"We will keep flexible hours so that clients who are still working elsewhere can come in and work on their business when needed," she said. The facility will be staffed whenever it is in use and will have a security system to ensure safety. Black will purchase shipping supplies in bulk to pass along the savings to clients leasing space. "It's expensive to ship products in and out of Bend," she said.

"Companies need to provide free shipping to compete with Amazon. The volume discounts given by carriers will reduce shipping costs in order for companies to be able to compete. The more members shipping out of Collective Pallet, the lower the rates will be."

Collective Pallet will maintain flexibility with the services it offers as well, Black said. "If you have a need that isn't listed on the website, ask us. We can work with you."

At this stage, Black is meeting with potential customers, assessing just what clients want and need, and is evolving Collective Pallet to be able to address those needs prior to actually launching. She hopes to open the facility in Spring of 2020 and is currently looking at potential sites. "I'm trying to get face-to-face with potential customers so I can get an idea of what size warehouse to lease. I'm asking potential clients what they want. I'm trying to determine if an inconvenient location in Bend at a lower rate is desired over an upscale prime location. I'm not saying 'no' to anything at this point," she explained. "But I have to prove this concept before I sign on the dotted line for a long-term lease. I don't want to be reckless." One such evolution that has already taken place is the idea of a shared workspace. Black did not originally plan to include this in Collective Pallet, but enough people have expressed interest in this that she changed her mind. "When you get like-minded people together, you learn from each other. You share ideas on ways to do things, from software programs to shipping methods." She added, "We will have a small co-working space, nothing fancy and very industrial, but it will be a place to get out of the house and be with your product and other people."