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ENTREPRENEURIAL

spirit

Our mission: Promoting the entrepreneurial spirit and creating economic wealth and diversity.

TOTAL RESULTS SINCE 1989:

Program Participants:
9414

Businesses Started, Stabilized,
and Expanded:
1023

Jobs Created or Retained:
2620

Dollars Loaned:
\$7,451,710

OFFICES:

8355 Unity Drive, Suite 100
Virginia, MN 55792

Ordean Building, Suite 400
424 West Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802

12 NW 3rd Street
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

1401 Tower Ave, Suite 302
Superior, WI 54880

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS:

- Blandin Foundation
- City of Duluth Community Development Block Grant
- City of Superior Community Development Block Grant
- Iron Range Resources
- John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
- Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- Minnesota Power
- SPEDCO
- St. Louis County Community Development Block Grant
- US Small Business Administration
- Women's Business Center
- Microloan Program

VP Septic and Excavating is 1,000th business helped by Northeast Entrepreneur Fund

A recent business loan to Mike Vidmar of VP Septic and Excavating marked the 1,000th business started, stabilized, or expanded with the help of the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund. The loan from the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund will be used to finance new equipment and working capital.

Mike has worked in the septic and excavating industry for more than 15 years and has received extensive education and training in the septic system technology. After ten years working for another company, Mike went out on his own, forming VP Septic and Excavating in May 2006.

"Running my own business is a good fit for me," says Mike. "Even when I was working for someone else, I was very independent. They could throw me out there on my own and know that I'd get the job done."

VP Septic and Excavating fills a unique niche in that it is a one-stop shop for a variety of interrelated services. In addition to designing and installing septic systems, VP Septic and Excavating provides a variety of services ranging from site clearing and basement excavation to driveways and landscaping. Customers



L-R: Steve Jacobson (NEF), Mike Vidmar, Bob Voss (NEF)

include homeowners, real estate agents, builders, and cities. A large portion of Mike's business has been in the Lake Vermilion area, where the growing demand for property brings a need for new construction, remodeling projects, and septic system inspection and installation.

VP Septic and Excavating is also able to offer very competitive pricing by maintaining low overhead costs. "The variety of services we provide requires multiple types of equipment and trucks and tools," explains Mike. "I own all the basic equipment that I use on a regular basis, and I lease other, project-specific equipment as needed." This practice saves

the expense of purchasing and maintaining equipment that isn't needed regularly, and allows Mike to offer very reasonable pricing.

"VP Septic and Excavating has a good reputation," says NEF business developer Steve Jacobson. "Mike has a lot of experience. The services his business provides are going to be in demand for many years to come."

VP Septic is based out of Cook and provides services throughout northern and central St. Louis County. For more information, call 218-750-0504 or email vpseptic@yahoo.com.



Mike and Diana Mohr

Gronk's means oversized fun for burger lovers

"Gronk's" may be an unusual name for any business, anywhere. What's even more unusual about this popular Superior, Wis., establishment is the way it promotes itself.

Not satisfied to offer an ordinary burgers-and-brew fare, owners Mike and Diana Mohr have created an entertaining experience for patrons of their roadside tavern. Dubbed Gronk's Grill & Bar after the nickname of Mike's brother, it is located on Highway 2/53 tucked inside the eastern city limits of Superior.

The up-north appeal of the pine-log exterior and interior draws a loyal band of locals as well as hunters, anglers and tourists on their way to and from northern Wisconsin. And the collection of outdoor oddities the Mohrs have assembled near the entrance invites more than a few curious looks from passing drivers.

These include a tilted telephone pole with fletching attached to resemble a gigantic arrow that has buried itself in the ground. A collection of fanciful wood-carved animals welcomes visitors. Above the door an enormous hand and finger points the way in. Nearby a

mileage sign lists the driving distances from Gronk's to faraway destinations like Chicago and Winnipeg.

But it's the menu offerings that really make Gronk's *the* place for those with varied—and large—appetites. It has won local "best burger" accolades several times. Simple, no-cost marketing differentiation inspired the Mohrs to advertise Gronk's as the "Home of the World-Famous Upside-Down Hamburger." (That's it—just the top bun on the bottom and vice versa.) It also offers Chicago-style hot dogs for its Windy City vacationers.

The biggest draw, though, is undoubtedly the "Enger Tower Burger," named after the famous structure located on Duluth's skyline. Only a few dozen customers have been able to fully devour this six-



patty monster within the allotted two-hour time limit. Those who successfully consume both the burger ("six stories of beef and five

pounds of fun") and the fries surrounding it ("the fries are the hill," says Mike) are awarded a Gronk's tee shirt and a photo on its web site.

Eating and drinking at Gronk's is simply a fun time, which the Mohrs work hard at creating for patrons, whether they're from Superior, Sweden or Singapore (yes, they've come from that far away). "We get people involved," says Mike Mohr. "It's a very personal thing for our customers."

After nine years of leasing, the Mohrs worked with Northeast Entrepreneur Fund business developer Shawn Wellnitz to purchase, renovate and remodel the building three years ago. "We were able to package a participation loan with Superior National Bank to meet Mike and Diana's financial needs," says Shawn.

"Our banker said the business plan that Shawn helped us put together was the finest he had ever seen," said Mike, who aims to expand Gronk's space next year to accommodate even more devoted diners.

Gronk's is easily found at 4909 E.2nd Street, Superior, WI 54880 (phone 715-398-0333). To learn more, visit www.gronksgrill.com.

"We get people involved. It's a very personal thing for our customers."

*-Mike Mohr
Gronk's Grill & Bar*



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Chelle Bakke joins staff as Greenstone Growth Group coach

The Greenstone Group recently appointed Chelle Bakke as business coach.

In her new role, Bakke will work with “growth groups” of 6 to 10 business owners who are participating in the Greenstone Group initiative, which is designed to support entrepreneurs in northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin who wish to significantly grow their companies.

Bakke will coordinate the recruitment, assessment and selection of potential growth group members. She will also provide one-on-one and group coaching and strategic guidance in helping them achieve their business and entrepreneurial goals.

Before joining the Greenstone Group, Bakke served as a

business developer for the Northspan Group in Duluth. Previously, she was a business developer for the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund, and served as executive director of the Lincoln Park Business Group. A native of Cloquet, Bakke holds an architectural technology degree from Lake Superior College.



Chelle Bakke



Greenstone Group featured in Knight Foundation multimedia report

In its recently released 2007-2008 Progress Report, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation highlights the newly formed Greenstone Group initiative, which is designed to support entrepreneurs in Northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin who wish to significantly grow their companies.

The Knight report describes the Greenstone Group as “a customized approach to building the region’s economy on the shoulders of local

entrepreneurs and small businesses.” It is one of only four Knight initiatives selected to be featured in the report.

To see (and comment on) Knight’s online progress report on the Greenstone Group, both text and video, go to http://progressreport.knightfoundation.org/2007/stories_of_transformation/detail.dot?id=328811.

The Greenstone Group, an initiative of the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund, was publicly

launched in January 2008. Currently more than 20 area business owners (from the Twin Ports, Iron Range and North Shore communities) are participating in Greenstone “growth groups,” coach-led teams working on individualized strategies for improving business performance and entrepreneurial development. Business owners interested in the Greenstone Group should contact Jerry Peterson, director of the Greenstone Group, jerry@greenstonegroup.org, 218-726-4870.

3RD QUARTER 2008 LOANS DISTRIBUTED

- Access Music Therapy of Northern MN, LLC—Duluth
- Aluminum Cabinet Co.—Duluth
- Bare Feet Heating & Cooling Solutions—Ely
- Beaner’s Central—Duluth
- Cindy Litchke Day Care—Coleraine
- D&K Advertising, Inc.—Cloquet
- K & B Drive-In—Eveleth
- Kid-Go-Round—Cloquet
- Living Food Farm—Deer River
- Morris Enterprises—Grand Rapids
- No Swetts—Duluth
- PS Vending, LLC—Duluth
- Tissue Engineering Consultants, Inc.—Duluth
- Uncommon Goods—Grand Rapids
- VP Septic & Excavating—Cook

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We'll help you start or grow your business.

Business training from the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund offers:

- Practical, non-academic approach
- Relaxed, supportive environment
- Instructors with real-life experience
- Affordable fees
- Variety of dates, times and locations near you

NEF also offers flexible financing options at competitive rates to qualified business owners.

Visit www.entrepreneurfund.org for class descriptions, schedules, locations and fees. Register online or call 1-800-422-0374. Pre-registration and payment required for all classes and workshops.

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