

# Engage

College of DuPage—  
your community college  
Vol. 1, No. 2

## From COD to CEO

Jim Elliott's Diveheart  
inspires adaptive divers  
to focus on abilities,  
not disabilities





## A Message from the President

In this second issue of *Engage*, you will learn about some of the entrepreneurial people, programs, and partnerships that set College of DuPage apart. This kind of innovative spirit benefits not only our students, but also our community, its companies, its nonprofit organizations and—most important—the people who live and work here. In some cases, our entrepreneurial graduates are also helping people around the world.

When many people think of higher education, especially community colleges, they imagine instructors sharing a fixed set of information that leads to a degree or certificate. At College of DuPage, we do that, of course, but just as often, we instill analytical thinking, creativity, problem solving and other tools that lead to invention and reinvention over time.

The word “entrepreneurship” is most often associated with the business world, but virtually every profession requires entrepreneurial thinking. Organizations, technology and society change quickly. So our nonprofits, our small businesses, our arts organizations,

our major corporations, our health companies and our government—all must be innovative and entrepreneurial.

At College of DuPage, we help make innovation happen through resources and collaboration, such as our Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation DuPage.

We bring innovative faculty members to the classroom—people with real-world experience who have reinvented themselves in their working lives.

Finally, we spark imagination, broaden experiences and encourage entrepreneurship among our students. That, after all, is the best way we know to launch new organizations, boost existing ones, and help support job growth throughout the district we serve.

We hope you enjoy this inside look at the innovation you make possible through College of DuPage.

—Ann Rondeau is president of College of DuPage.

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# For the Community...

## Relax and Unwind with a Massage

Massage therapy clinics offered onsite at College of DuPage give community members a smart choice to relieve stress, soothe aching muscles, treat problem areas and generate a sense of well-being.

“We offer professional or student clinic massages at a reduced rate,” said Pat O’Shaughnessy, Massage Therapy program manager. “All professionals are licensed, and students work under the supervision of licensed instructors.”

Massage helps to relax muscles, manage pain, improve blood flow, enhance flexibility, strengthen the immune system, ease headaches, support posture and increase energy flow. Recent customers have remarked on the clean, professional atmosphere, and on the opportunity to get a great massage at prices well below those offered outside the College.



The clinics offer the following therapeutic treatments:

- Asian Modalities (includes Thai, Tuina and Shiatsu)
- Craniosacral Therapy
- Deep-Tissue Massage
- Pre-Natal Massage/Bodywork
- Reiki
- Reflexology
- Sports Performance Massage
- Swedish/Wellness Massage

“Our students from the Massage Therapy program get real life experience working on various body types and ages,” she said. “By getting a chance to work in a simulated, professional environment, it’s a boost to their education and to their future job prospects.”

No walk-ins are accepted, but appointments are available in the Student Resource Center (SRC), Room 1110. You may also make an appointment by calling (630) 942-2208 or by going to [cod.edu/massagetherapy](http://cod.edu/massagetherapy) and selecting “Book a Massage Now.”



## Big Help for Small Business

For those looking to start a small business, take an existing business to a higher level, or find answers to questions about licensing, government contracting, marketing exposure or expanding into the international business arena, the Center for Entrepreneurship can inspire, educate and empower them to reach new heights of success.

“Coaching and advising small business is our passion!” said Center Manager Rita Haake. “Our team of six works with any small business at any level—from ideation all the way to a growth phase. Our services are meant to be ongoing and long term.”

In the 21 years that Haake has been involved in the Center, it has worked with more than 10,000 businesses and given more than 62,000 hours of advising.

As part of COD’s Continuing Education division, the Center for Entrepreneurship offers three core programs, and does not charge for its services:

The Illinois Small Business Development Center provides assistance with management, marketing, finance and operations.

The Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Center advises in the areas of expansion through governmental contracting and selling to new markets.

The Illinois International Trade Center gives specialized and customized assistance to ensure export readiness in the global marketplace.

The Center also offers workshops, training sessions and professional development through its Business Solutions and Small Business Development Center divisions, and its new venture, Innovation DuPage, opening in downtown Glen Ellyn this fall, will provide more exciting opportunities for small business and entrepreneurial partnerships.

Contact the Center to learn more:  
(630) 942-2600  
[cod.edu/entrepreneurship](http://cod.edu/entrepreneurship)



Photos of Jim Elliott by Art Carrillo/special to College of DuPage. Special thanks to DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Hotel & Conference Center, Downers Grove.

# From COD to CEO

COD alum and Diveheart founder Jim Elliott is a breath of fresh oxygen for people with disabilities

The stereotypical college-to-career story goes like this:

Go to school.  
Earn your degree in a particular field.  
Go to work in that field.

But sometimes, even the most remote collegiate experience can make an unexpected impact long after the student has left the classroom.

Case in point: COD alumnus Jim Elliott.

Elliott studied journalism at COD. After earning his associate degree, he earned a bachelor's in sports writing from Northern Illinois University.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the press box.

An entrepreneur since he started caddying at Riverside Golf Club at age 12, Elliott quickly moved from sports writing to advertising sales.

He remained in the media business for two decades, working as an advertising executive for the Chicago Tribune Media Group, WGN and CLTV.

Then, despite his annual six-figure salary, he quit. Instead of selling space and time, he founded a nonprofit organization—one that has since helped thousands of people with disabilities in Illinois and around the world.

And it all started not with a journalism class—but a scuba diving class—at College of DuPage.

Elliott, now 61, is the founder of the Diveheart Foundation ([www.diveheart.org](http://www.diveheart.org)). Established in Downers Grove in 2001, this non-profit 501(c)3 organization set out to “build confidence and independence and self esteem in children, adults [including military veterans] with disabilities through scuba diving.”

Yes, you read that correctly: Diveheart helps people who've lost limbs; people who suffer from chronic pain; people with cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injuries, autism and other conditions by getting them into the water and breathing oxygen from tanks on their backs.

And yes, this is all headquartered in the flatlands of Chicagoland.

The Diveheart seed was planted when Elliott's daughter Erin was born blind in 1980. Elliott and his wife initially thought their daughter might be brain damaged. When it turned out, instead, to be blindness, they were delighted.

“We can work with that,” said Elliott.

As a mainstreamed student, Erin was teased about her eyes. When Elliott learned about a snow skiing program designed for blind children, he encouraged Erin to enroll. It became a favorite father-daughter activity. It helped build her confidence and self esteem. It helped reduce the teasing.

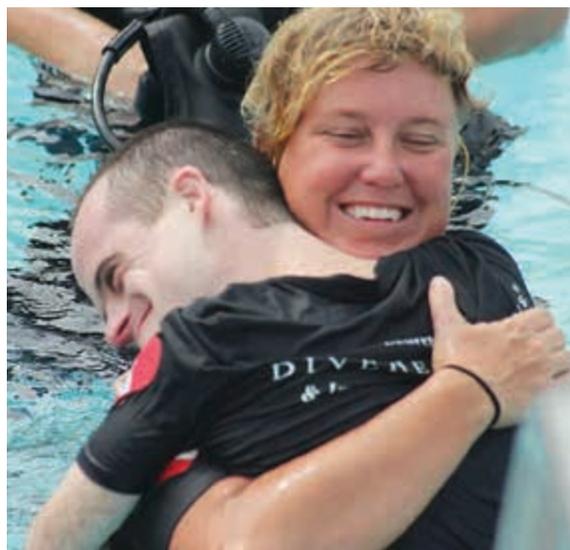
“She went from Erin the blind girl to Erin the skier,” said Elliott.

The impact on Erin also got Elliott thinking: If snow skiing can do this for blind people, what could scuba diving do for people with disabilities? He toyed with the idea for a dozen years.

“I just didn't know how to make it happen,” said Elliott.

But like a lot of things in his life, Elliott the entrepreneur figured it out.

By the year 2000, Elliott's four children (including Erin) were grown and living on their own. He was divorced. His grandmother needed some help to live independently in her home, so Elliott-the-former-ad-guy became Elliott-the-caregiver. He also founded



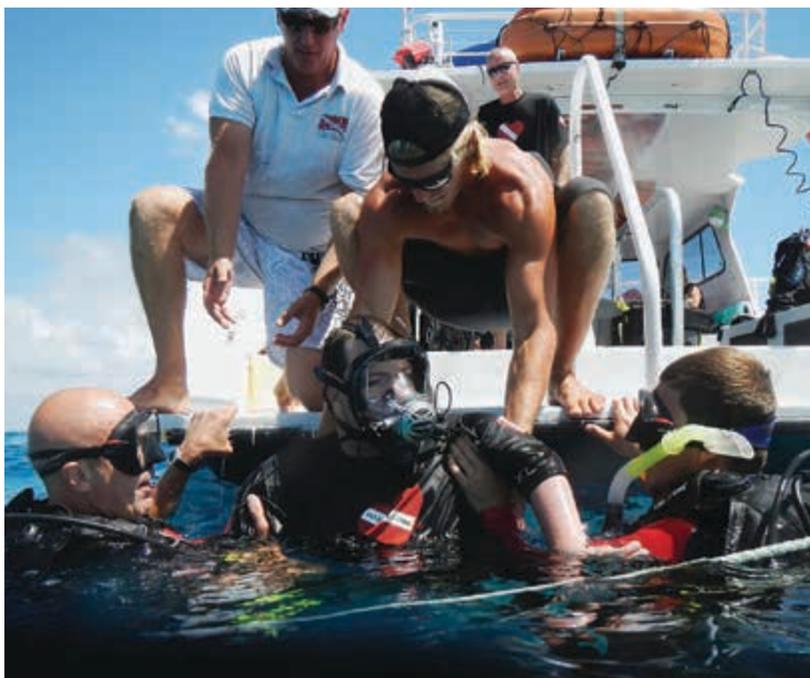
**“People move from depression to fireball. They go on to do amazing things in the world. Diving gives them a purpose. They feel valued.”**

**—COD alum and Diveheart founder Jim Elliott**

*(continued on page 5)*



*Clockwise from top:* Jim Elliott dives with Ana Calvo, who was born without limbs; an adaptive diver is carefully assisted with their entry into the water by a Diveheart crew; veterans Greg Rodriguez (below left) and Terry Thomas (left, with Jim) were participants in the Diveheart Military Wounded program, a division of Diveheart.



# “The benefits to the body, mind and spirit are amazing.”

Diveheart out of his grandmother’s spare bedroom. “There was scuba gear all over the place,” said Elliott.

In the 17 years since its founding, Diveheart has become a world leader in scuba training and experiences for people with “different abilities.” The big benefit, Elliott said, is the absence of gravity.

“There are lots of disability therapy programs,” said Elliott. “But we own zero gravity.”

While people with physical disabilities might one day benefit from space travel, Elliott said, that’s not practical or affordable right now.

“Water is inner space,” said Elliott. “Being an aquanaut is cheaper and faster than being an astronaut.”

Through Diveheart, people who can’t stand on their own find themselves vertical underwater. People who can’t move without wheelchairs are self-propelled beneath the surface.

Whether in a swimming pool with Diveheart volunteers in Illinois or in the ocean with Diveheart-trained professionals off the coast of Florida or Cozumel, the paradigm shift, said Elliott, is dramatic.

“The benefits to the body, mind and spirit are amazing,” said Elliott. “People move from depression to fireball.

They go on to do amazing things in the world. Diving gives them a purpose. They feel valued.”

Elliott said the positive impact is both physical and emotional. In fact, Diveheart has worked with university researchers to prove some of those benefits, including the benefits of breathing oxygen in deep ocean water to help people dealing with chronic pain.

One well-known Illinoisan who accepted Elliott’s invitation to take the Diveheart plunge at a local swimming pool in 2012 was Tammy Duckworth—at

the time a veterans’ affairs professional (now a U.S. Senator). Duckworth lost her right leg near the hip and her left leg below the knee during combat in Iraq.

“I was apprehensive,” Duckworth said of her Diveheart experience. “You lose a lot of strength. You lose a lot of confidence,” Duckworth said of her experience as a paraplegic. “But with the buoyancy of the water and zero gravity, I felt strong and powerful. I was able to keep up with everybody else, just using my arms. It was very liberating.”

In the past 17 years, Diveheart has evolved into a sophisticated nonprofit. Contributions in 2016 totaled \$362,290, with expenses of \$378,000. Diveheart employs only a few part-time staffers. Elliott, who works full time, takes no salary. Even when Elliott travels, he bums space from friends to unfurl his bedroll. It’s all part of his philosophy of doing a lot for a little.

“Right now, we’re down a vehicle,” he said, ever the salesman. “If you know anyone, we need a Suburban or a Tahoe. And we have 2,000 square feet of donated gear in a basement. We need volunteers to work on equipment.”

Elliott said the journalism, public relations and

marketing skills he honed at COD come in handy every day. And his sales skills help convince donors, sponsors and volunteers to pitch in. Diveheart has been covered over the years by “CNN Heroes with Heart,” “NBC World News Tonight,” “HLN Stories of Courage,” “CNN Money,” *Huffington Post*, and many Chicago-area media.

One person who’s taken the Diveheart plunge only once: Elliott’s daughter, Erin. Her reasoning: “Skiing is my thing, Dad. Diving’s yours.”



**“I was apprehensive ... but with the buoyancy of the water and zero gravity, I felt strong and powerful. I was able to keep up with everybody else, just using my arms. It was very liberating.”**

**—U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth**



Photos of Peter James by Art Carrillo/special to College of DuPage

# ‘Own your career’

Peter James shares key to entrepreneurial success

Mind your own business takes on new meaning when Peter James is in the classroom. The COD assistant professor offers sound business advice based on personal experience.

“I realized that you have to really own your career if you’re going to be successful and accomplish your dreams,” said James, who joined the COD business faculty three years ago to teach and cultivate the entrepreneurial culture on campus.

“I want my students to be able to walk out of college knowing I’ve got to own this career of mine as opposed to their organizations telling them this is how we want to promote you or this is where we want you to go, this is what we envision for you,” said James. “Well, no, what do you envision for you. I think that’s huge from my perspective.”

Born and raised in New York City, the Georgia State graduate and former Army officer has a knack for keeping his options open: military service; pharmaceutical marketing and sales; running his own coaching and consulting business; teaching at eight colleges and universities; and serving as faculty chair at a leading technical school.

His own journey helped James see entrepreneurship through a unique lens.

“I think entrepreneurship is seeing gaps and opportunities in the marketplace or in your career and seizing them, even under uncertain conditions. You

could be an entrepreneur in an organization because you’re helping the organization grow,” said James. “It’s not just always about starting a new business. Taking a step outside of your comfort zone, going out on a limb, leaving a job for a better job when you’re not quite sure how it’s going to end up—that’s entrepreneurship, taking those calculated risks.”

James holds no secret to success, just an openness to see people and opportunities for what they are.

“It took me 10 years after I left the military to really understand that everybody’s strengths are not like mine,” said James. “Everyone’s background and emotional needs are not like mine, but you need them all to work together to be successful in whatever work you do.”

James understands that developing strong relationships is essential in business and in life—a real-world lesson James shares with his students.

“One of the things I pride myself on is staying connected to both corporate and entrepreneurial worlds outside of campus so I can continue to bring those to the classroom,” said James. “Bringing individuals to the classroom or the club, who are actually in the middle of their grind, career or entrepreneurship venture, I think that’s invaluable as well. Although I can talk to students all day long about theory, concepts and terms, there’s nothing like seeing it in action.”



**“I want my students to be able to walk out of college knowing I’ve got to own this career of mine as opposed to their organizations telling them this is how we want to promote you or this is where we want you to go, this is what we envision for you. Well, no, what do you envision for you?”**

**—Assistant Professor Peter James,  
Business/Management/Marketing**



# Business Matters

Blending learning with real-world know-how

Cosmetology student Katherine Banks wants to build her clientele at a hair salon where she plans to work after graduation.

Courtney Hunley hopes to sell some of her handmade decorative letters and nap pillows, a hobby for the COD student who plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in hospitality.

Partners Daanish Azim and Kofi Instifu—enrolled in the business and physical therapy assistant programs respectively—plan to meet people and develop new clients for their year-old energy drink business.

Welcome to COD's first Maker Market.

Held in April and hosted by the COD Business/Management/Marketing program and Center for Entrepreneurship, the event drew 25 participants eager to set up shop and sell their products, services and business ideas in the Student Services Center atrium.

"We wanted to feature our students. We knew they did so many great things across the campus. It just seemed to fit in really well with the whole entrepreneurship idea and giving them a platform to actually sell," said Bev Carlson, program support

specialist who proposed the idea and helped organize the Maker Market, also open to the community. The College provided the space and printed promotional materials for those who accepted the offer.

The triple discipline Business/Management/Marketing program gives students a strong foundation for success after college. Experiences like the Maker Market, the Entrepreneurship Club and the Emerging Entrepreneur program, or E2 for short, which pairs students with successful entrepreneurs and businesspeople, help students put essential business concepts into practice—no matter their field of interest or study.

"A welder can be an entrepreneur, an artist, graphic designer, nurse, writer, speaker... entrepreneurship bleeds over into so many other disciplines," said Peter James, assistant professor who teaches business, marketing, management and entrepreneurship classes. "When you want to start a business, it's very important to understand the financial part of it, the accounting part of it, how to market, how to be a manager."

James looks to expose Entrepreneurship Club members and officers to the world of opportunity that



awaits them, but also maintains connections with the local entrepreneurship community. He hopes to attract more students and sponsors for the big pitch contest in the fall—and build more excitement for the next Maker Market farther down the road.

Banks learned about the Maker Market from James, who came to COD’s Addison Center to invite students like her to get involved. She said his enthusiasm sold her on the idea. “It just seemed like a really good opportunity to get out, meet new people, network and see if this is a good way to promote myself,” she explained.

Completing his second year of business, marketing and management classes, Azim plans to enroll in the 3+1 program to earn his Bachelor of Arts degree in Management offered through COD and Benedictine University. COD has partnered with prominent universities to offer high-caliber degree programs at a greatly reduced cost, including a 3+1 with Concordia University’s B.A. in Healthcare Management. To qualify for these 3+1 options, COD students like Azim must complete an Associate in Applied Science in Management or Marketing.

“These 3+1 options allow students to maximize the amount of coursework they can complete at COD prices. They also allow students to dig into business/management/marketing content early in their academic careers,” said Shannon Toler, professor and Business/Management/Marketing program coordinator.

For students looking to transfer to four-year schools, Toler explained COD has excellent articulation with UIC, NIU, Elmhurst College, North Central College and Benedictine University, to name a few.

COD offers six management certificates as well as two marketing certificates.

“One of the most exciting new programs we have is our Human Resource Management Certificate,” said Toler. “This is a nine-hour certificate that provides a credential for individuals seeking entry-level human resource generalist and specialist positions. The initial course can be taken in the classroom or online in 8-week, 12-week or 16-week length terms. The final three courses are offered as a learning community over a single 16-week term. A student is then finished with this certificate within two semesters.”

Toler said courses in the business, management and marketing disciplines also provide a nice option for career changers.

Above left and center: Among the many booths present, COD’s first Maker Market featured handmade decorative letters and nap pillows made by Courtney Hunley, as well as hair styling by Katherine Banks. (Photos by Terence Guider-Shaw, special to College of DuPage.) Above right: Business professor Shannon Toler works with her students to determine career goals and best course options. (Photo by Diane Smutny, special to College of DuPage.)



Photos of Ellee Crawford by Diane Smutny/special to College of DuPage

# Pet Project Leads to Success

Entrepreneurship has no age limits

A business owner at 13 and a high school graduate at 16, Wheaton's Ellee Crawford knows a thing or two about setting goals high and working hard to achieve them.

"I officially started Small Pets and Company when I was 13, but only sold a few products here and there," said Crawford, who enrolled in her first class at College of DuPage as a 15-year-old high school freshman. "It took a LOT of work to get very few sales, and I actually gave up for about a year, but then came back to it and kept at it."

Small Pets and Company produces reusable cage liners. The liners wick the pets' urine into an absorbent layer to keep the animals dry and their cages from smelling.

"I was fortunate to have a passion, knowledge and some expertise around rabbits and guinea pigs," Crawford said. "I had a sick rabbit that needed a better solution for bedding. I created a ridiculous solution, but it helped in my situation. Then I realized that companies sell much better cage liners

online. I kept changing and adapting my product until I was able to take it to the market. Then I had to figure out how to compete against individuals and companies that had been selling for several years."

"It really took off in early 2016," she said. Today her liners sell on Amazon and she uses a manufacturer to make them.

Crawford began attending COD full time in fall 2016 as a Business major, and she won the inaugural Pitch Contest sponsored by COD's Entrepreneurship Club and E2 Emerging Entrepreneurs Mentoring program. She used the \$1,000 prize to help fund her business.

"My time at COD has contributed to my success in allowing me to explore my interest in entrepreneurship and get a solid foundation. I also had the opportunity to be an officer for the Entrepreneurship Club, which is a great way to connect with like-minded students who are working on their own businesses."

She credited Assistant Professor Peter James with linking her to the College's business program. "His entrepreneurship course is one of the best and most applicable courses I've taken at COD," she said.

Armed with that knowledge, she has used it to formulate strategies for moving her business forward.

"Something that I do every day is to always push back," she said. "There are so many situations that I run into where at the surface, something doesn't seem

doable, but by researching more, talking to someone else, or attempting to do it anyway, I'll find out that it was totally an option after all."

Crawford also had to learn how to deal with the inevitable doubt all entrepreneurs face at certain points in their endeavors. "There were many days that I felt discouraged and lost hope based on sales for a particular day or week, sometimes even a few months," she said. "But when I looked back, I saw progress."

She said she struggles with being so engrossed in her business that she "forgets to have balance in my life and I get temporarily burned out."

"In order to avoid that, I try to remember that entrepreneurship is all about learning. Yes, it's so fun at times and it can feel so exhilarating, but whether I had an amazing day of sales or didn't sell a single product that day, at the end of the day if I learned something, I was successful."

Her advice to other young people looking to go into business for themselves?

"I think it's important to be happy with your work and proud of your product or service, but it's even more important

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**"I am 17 now, and it's crazy to think that literally thousands of small animals have one of my cage liners in their habitat."**

**—Ellee Crawford, owner, Small Pets and Company**

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to research first and find a gap in the market that you can fill. Figure out where your expertise and passions are needed, and go from there. What worked best for me was to make decisions very quickly, and adapt even faster. When I first started selling cage liners, I realized that it is a very difficult industry to enter. The only way to not disappear in a marketplace that competitive is to be the better option for the customer."

With so much business experience at such a young age, Crawford is contemplating her future path.

"I am 17 now, and it's crazy to think that literally thousands of small animals have one of my cage liners in their habitat. Every once in a while I will see a photo posted of a customer's guinea pig or rabbit with their new cage liner, and it makes me so happy."

"I am working on prototypes for new product lines and I just want to see how far I can take Small Pets and Company. I am so fulfilled and driven by the highs and lows of entrepreneurship and the whole journey in general. My goal is to own businesses for the rest of my life, and not work for someone else."

# Innovation DuPage

## Incubation, Acceleration, Collaboration

Promoting business growth and job creation are just two goals of Innovation DuPage, a cooperative venture that already is generating excitement in the regional business community.

Modeled after other successful innovation centers such as Chicago's 1871 and the Business Accelerator at Everett Community College in Washington, Innovation DuPage will connect small businesses with the necessary resources to thrive while providing new owners with the tools to succeed.

"Innovation DuPage will significantly impact regional economic development by supporting startup and early-stage business enterprises," said College of DuPage President Dr. Ann Rondeau. "By using the College's experts and developing a diverse network of partners from civic, educational and business sectors, Innovation DuPage has enormous potential to benefit both the business community and local citizens."

College of DuPage initially developed Innovation DuPage with partners Choose DuPage, Rev3, the Village of Glen Ellyn, Benedictine University and Elmhurst College. Northern Illinois University, Chamber 630 and other key economic development partners have joined the effort.

This summer, the College will begin renovating 8,200 square feet of currently vacant space in the Glen Ellyn Civic Center for Innovation DuPage.

"Downtown Glen Ellyn is an ideal location and continues our long-standing partnership with the Village," Rondeau said. "This new venture is the culmination of years of planning and will cultivate the creative spirit that exists in our area."

Joe Cassidy, Dean of Continuing Education and Extended Learning at College of DuPage and Chairman of the Board of Directors for Innovation DuPage, a nonprofit corporation, said the state needs entrepreneurs.

"The Kaufman Index of Growth Entrepreneurship ranks Illinois 17th among the top 25 most populous states," he said. "Greater DuPage has a diverse industry base, venture capital is strong, and yet we have to

actively work in a collaborative and focused way to advance our innovation ecosystem in order to grow business and jobs.

"In addition, 50 percent of all private-sector jobs are within small businesses while nearly two-thirds of job creation in the past decade have come from small businesses. However, nearly one-third of new businesses fail within the first two years. Innovation DuPage can help these businesses by providing expertise early on that will lead to success."

College of DuPage has a history of working with local businesses through the establishment of the Business and Professional Institute (now Business Solutions) in 1979 and the Center for Workforce Development (now the Center for Entrepreneurship) in 1984.

Deanne Mazzochi, Chairman of the College of DuPage Board of Trustees, said Innovation DuPage builds upon what COD has and takes it to the next level.

"Entrepreneurs and small business owners are always in need of learning, skills and access to resources, education, networks and future employees," she said. "By providing opportunities, we can reduce barriers and better the odds of helping innovators and our students to achieve real-world success."

In FY15 and FY16, the Center helped small- and medium-sized businesses close \$192 million in contracts, \$4.7 million in exports and \$9.5 million in capital loans. In 2017 alone, the Center's clients were awarded \$22.1 million in contracts and \$7.5 million in exports, while Center staff held 4,936 counseling sessions and hosted 186 seminars. Since 1994, this team helped businesses generate more than \$1.2 billion in exports, contracts, capital and loans.

Rita Haake, Manager of the Center for Entrepreneurship, recently helped Innovation DuPage launch the first Accelerator Cohort program aimed at small businesses that generally have been in operation for at least two years, showed revenues of \$200,000 or more and employed a minimum of two employees. The



Innovation DuPage will connect small businesses with the necessary resources to thrive while providing new owners with the tools to succeed.

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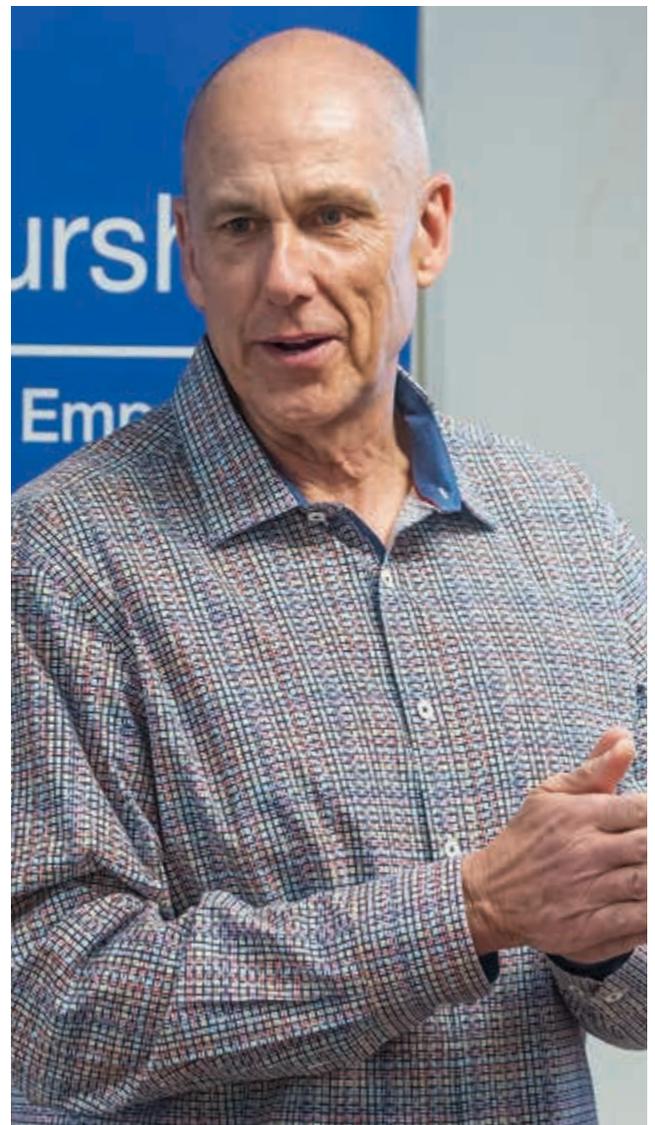
(From left) Glen Ellyn Village Manager Mark Franz, Glen Ellyn Village President Diane McGinley, College of DuPage President Dr. Ann Rondeau, Choose DuPage President and CEO John Carpenter, and COD Dean of Continuing Education Joseph Cassidy stand in front of the Glen Ellyn Civic Center, where Innovation DuPage will be located.



Renovation of 8,200 square feet of currently vacated space in the Glen Ellyn Civic Center will begin this summer, converting the former police department into Innovation DuPage.



Chris and Mary Ginder (above), participants in the inaugural Innovation DuPage Accelerator Cohort program, are the founders of Gindo's Spice of Life. They praised the program for its in-depth curriculum and the strong relationship built among the participants. Cohort member Manvee Vaid (below) listens to a presentation by COD alumnus Dennis Barsema (right), former CEO of Redback Networks, a successful startup telecommunications firm in Silicon Valley.



# “Downtown Glen Ellyn is an ideal location and continues our long-standing partnership with the Village.”

—College of DuPage President  
Dr. Ann Rondeau

12-week program consisted of lectures, peer-to-peer structured sessions and customized business coaching from mentors and staff.

Haake said owners need to learn how to work on their businesses and not just in them. The hope was to attract five people for the first cohort.

“We exceeded all expectations by enrolling 12 people from 10 businesses that represented a broad range of services, from a production and management company that specializes in craft beer festivals to a home health care company,” she said. “It was truly exciting to see how quickly they bonded together. Even though their businesses were different, they learned from one another and plan to continue meeting on their own.”

In 2011, cohort participants Chris and Mary Ginder started Gindo’s Spice of Life, which sells a wide array of specialty hot sauces using ingredients mainly sourced from local farmers. Mary, a College of DuPage graduate, said they initially hoped the class would help them streamline their operation.

“We were surprised by the community vibe that developed among all of us and how much we wanted to help each other out,” she said.

“We really got to think about our business, determined how to become even more efficient and then created processes and strategies.

“I would strongly recommend this cohort to anyone who owns a business and hits road blocks, because it will help you change your perceptions and develop strong practices.”

The Center for Entrepreneurship is an important component of Innovation DuPage. Helping to define

support services and incubator programming is Travis Linderman, the new Managing Director of Innovation DuPage. He previously served as director for venture incubators in Princeton, N.J., Ann Arbor and most recently at TechNexus Venture Collaborative in downtown Chicago.

Linderman recognizes the exceptional opportunity that Innovation DuPage represents for regional prosperity.



**“The region is home to leading educational institutions, premiere corporations, emerging startups and two national laboratories—Argonne and Fermilab.”**

—Travis Linderman, Managing Director,  
Innovation DuPage

“I am excited by the possibilities for economic development and new job creation that exist with this venture,” he said. “The region is home to leading educational institutions, premiere corporations, emerging startups and two national laboratories—Argonne and Fermilab. This is an ideal location for corporate expansion and rapid growth of innovative companies.”

Cassidy noted that community colleges traditionally play key roles in regional economic development by educating a significant portion of all U.S. undergraduates and training the unemployed and underemployed. By spearheading Innovation DuPage, College of DuPage can leverage its expertise and resources along with its partners to create a unique undertaking.

“We have been discussing and working on this project for years, so to say we are excited to be at this point is an understatement,” he said. “More and more potential partners are approaching us because they see the benefit of this venture. Innovation DuPage has enormous potential and we believe it will have a positive long-term impact on our local communities, the region and the state.”

# Taking an Innovative Path

## Education Fuels Entrepreneurial Spirit of COD Alumni

College of DuPage alumni Ben Chernivsky, Jordan Guide and Laura Pekarik each began their secondary education at COD after being influenced by relatives.

Chernivsky decided to attend the College after being persuaded by his mother. Guide's goal was to fulfill her general education requirements and then transfer to a four-year institution, as her sister had previously done. Pekarik initially enrolled because it was close to home and her father convinced her to do so.

They did not plan on becoming entrepreneurs when they initially arrived at COD. However, each is now a successful business owner who attributes part of their success to opportunities received as students.

While studying photography, Chernivsky participated in the Disney College Program, which provides students with a semester-long paid internship with The Walt Disney Company. He said the experience did more than simply improve his resumé. It also offered him self-assurance.

"Participating in the program built a ton of confidence for me," he said. "Getting away from home really allowed me to become a bit more independent."

Since completing the program, that same confidence has continued to play a key role in Chernivsky's journey. He was the photography editor at *The Courier*, COD's student newspaper, and later worked in magazine and journalism photography. He has since opened a successful wedding photography business, This Is Feeling, after realizing there was a lack of innovation and creativity in the industry. Chernivsky also started a second business, Gifyyy, which manufactures animated gif photo booths that are selling around the world.

After earning an Associate in Arts degree, Guide followed through on her plan and transferred to DePaul University to study marketing and advertising. However, she decided to return to COD for what she felt was a more creative field, Interior Design, and earned an Associate in Applied Science degree. Courses she took at COD introduced her to influential industry professionals, including one who would later become a mentor.

"My instructors brought in guest speakers who were corporate and independent designers," Guide said. "In my Business Practices course, I had the pleasure of meeting Barbara Pallat, who had started her own firm. After later interning with Barbara Pallat Interiors, I knew that an independent practice was tangible."

Guide was eventually offered a full-time position as an interior design associate at Barbara Pallat Interiors and later joined a firm in Chicago. She now runs her own firm, Jordan Guide Design, which services residential and commercial clients, and founded WALLTAT.com, a direct-to-consumer wall art company specializing in artistic, customizable wall decals that she sold in 2015.

Pekarik earned her Associate in Applied Science degree in Business and transferred to Elmhurst College

to pursue business and advertising. However, before she could complete her degree, her sister Kathy was diagnosed with cancer.

Kathy's battle inspired Pekarik to open Courageous Bakery & Café, home to Cupcakes for Courage, which raises

money for cancer research and other local nonprofits. Pekarik said courses she took at COD have helped her as a business owner.

"Two classes I recall that I still refer back to are Anthropology and Marketing," Pekarik said. "Anthropology opened my eyes to studying the behavior of people in their environments. I apply this every day and try to come from a place of acceptance and giving everyone an equal opportunity. My Marketing class made me think outside the box."

While Chernivsky, Guide and Pekarik's paths have each included twists and turns, the COD alumni have used their education to travel the road to success, which they know is a marathon and not a sprint. Pekarik advised aspiring entrepreneurs to appreciate the journey and not just the reward.

"It's the journey and not the destination," Pekarik said. "Set your goals high and know that if you keep trying you will never fail."

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**"It's the journey and not the destination. Set your goals high and know that if you keep trying you will never fail."**

—Laura Pekarik, Courageous Bakery & Café

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Jordan Guide runs her own interior design firm, Jordan Guide Design, which services residential and commercial clients. Photo by Tori Soper/special to College of DuPage.



Ben Chernivsky opened a wedding photography business, This Is Feeling, and also started a second business, Gifyyy, which manufactures animated gif photo booths. Photo by Terence Guider-Shaw/special to College of DuPage.



Laura Pekarik is the owner of Courageous Bakery & Café, home to Cupcakes for Courage, which raises money for cancer research and other local nonprofits. Photo by Tori Soper/special to College of DuPage.

# ECRWSSSEDDM

## Residential Customer



A business owner at 13 and a high school graduate at 16, COD student and Wheaton resident Ellee Crawford sets her goals high and works hard to achieve them. See page 11 for more.

## Engage

**VOL. 1, NO. 2** Published June 2018 by the Office of Marketing and Creative Services at College of DuPage

Direct all comments and questions to the editor at [jorgensenl@cod.edu](mailto:jorgensenl@cod.edu).

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