

SCORE to bring business mentoring services to Gaylord

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GAYLORD — Small business operators — and people who aspire to that role — soon will have a new source of mentoring services to draw upon in Gaylord.

By early 2017, organizers hope a new Gaylord-based branch of SCORE (previously known as the Service Corps of Retired Executives) will be ready to accept clients. SCORE is a national organization through which experienced business owners and executives — many of them retired — volunteer their expertise to counsel prospective and existing small businesses. Clients can obtain these services confidentially and free of charge.

"We want to help those who are starting, those who are looking to expand, those who are maybe looking to buy or sell a business, and hopefully just provide another tool to help more businesses stay in Northern Michigan," said Lisa McComb, Otsego County Economic Alliance executive director.

The Otsego County Economic Alliance is working with SCORE's existing Tip of the Mitt chapter, based in Petoskey, to establish the new branch, hoping to provide a resource for clients in Otsego as well as neighboring counties. Five volunteer mentors with varied business expertise have signed on so far.

"We're absolutely looking for more volunteers to do this," McComb added.

McComb became familiar with SCORE's services while working for Northern Shores Community Development, a Harbor Springs-based financial institution providing loans to entrepreneurs. And through her involvement with a regional prosperity initiative, she became aware of gaps to be filled in northeast Michigan for the entrepreneurial resources which SCORE offers. The economic alliance approached the Tip of the Mitt chapter with the idea of establishing a SCORE presence in Gaylord.

Margo Johnson, who chairs the Tip of the Mitt chapter and has a human resource management background, said the group already has worked with some Gaylord area clients and is aware that SCORE does not have any chapters in the northeastern Lower Peninsula.

"The growth over there in Gaylord would indicate that they certainly need help," she added.

The Gaylord SCORE branch will start out as an affiliate of the Tip of the Mitt group, but could become a standalone chapter if it can build a lineup of 15 mentors. The economic alliance will assist with scheduling and provide use of its office space for SCORE counseling sessions — although mentors also can meet clients elsewhere if desired. New mentors will complete online SCORE training and also sit in on existing mentors' sessions with clients as part of their orientation.

Along with mentors who have general business ownership and management experience, McComb said organizers hope to attract executives and professionals with expertise in fields such as human resources, finance, business law and marketing/social media. To learn more about the new SCORE branch's volunteer opportunities and planned offerings, contact the economic alliance at (989) 731-0287.

Until the new branch is ready to accept appointments, the Petoskey-based SCORE group will continue offering its services to Gaylord area clients.

To learn more, see tipofthemittscore.org or call the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce at (231) 347-4150.