

## Unified Therapy Services, Inc., Dubuque



The Iowa Small Business Development Center at Northeast Iowa Community College helped Kelly Heysinger and Gina Blean extensively over several years to start and grow their pediatric outpatient therapy business into the successful company it is today.

Unified Therapy Services was an unrealized dream when Kelly Heysinger and Gina Blean first came to the Northeast Iowa Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Dubuque for assistance. They had developed

a strong working relationship while providing therapy at a clinic in Clinton, Iowa. Even though they took very different routes in getting to Clinton, they both had an entrepreneurial spirit that soon developed into a successful business partnership. They shared a dream about a child friendly facility that would offer physical, occupational, and speech language therapy services where patients would be treated with a holistic approach using a team-based setting. This vision of a unique rehab agency focusing on pediatric outpatient therapy matched their passions as therapists.

The two women enrolled in the SBDC's Smart Start class in July 2005, where they began learning the details, research, and business vision necessary to develop an effective, comprehensive business plan and cash flow statements. After a number of customized counseling sessions, e-mails, and phone calls with Northeast Iowa SBDC Regional Director Terry Sullivan, the partners perfected their professional business plan and cash flow projections for presentation to three financial institutions.

Kelly and Gina worked diligently for nine months from their initial contact with the Northeast Iowa SBDC to the opening of their business. Unified Therapy Services proudly opened in April 2006 with Gina as the Speech Language Pathologist, Kelly as the Physical Therapist, an Occupational Therapist, and one office staff person, all in a 4,000 square foot facility built to their specific needs. They ended 2006 with 4 full-time staff and 2 volunteers but found that they needed to quickly add more staff due to their rapidly increasing client load—they had started with three patients and one year later they had 120 patients. By the end of 2007 they had 7 full-time and 4 part-time employees and needed to increase their office space. As a temporary solution, they thought creatively and converted storage space and the staff's break room into office space and treatment areas totaling 5,700 square feet. It was very important to keep all staff members housed in one location, as this created an atmosphere for ongoing patient communication and excellent patient care. The partners obtained two SBA-guaranteed business loans for the initial build-out, equipment, and working capital.

The business continued to grow and Kelly and Gina soon found they needed more facility space because they were hiring more employees to handle their ever-increasing patient load. The two women considered several options and through careful planning and number

crunching they finally decided to purchase the building next to their existing location and build it out to suit their needs. This was an extremely tactical move because their clients would not have to hunt for their new facilities and they could monitor the build-out with little disruption to their daily routine.

With advice again from the Northeast Iowa SBDC, Kelly and Gina revised their original business plan, restructured the company to include building ownership, completed new cash flow projections, negotiated a lease, invested \$200,000 of their own capital, and obtained a loan to purchase the building next door. By the end of 2008 the business employed 11 full-time and 6 part-time employees, and renovations of Unified Therapy Services' new facility continued.

Gina and Kelly said, "The Small Business Development Center assisted us in making our dreams a reality. From attending the Smart Start class to all of our private meetings with the director, we learned to ask ourselves the tough questions. Through analyzing every component of our business and the statistical information of our small business and the Dubuque area, we successfully completed our business plan and ventured forward with our dream. The knowledge we gained from the private meetings enabled us to appropriately lay the foundation of what our business would be built on. The director was a great resource and someone we look up to and continue to lean on for guidance with various stages of our business growth. Without the support of the SBDC our small business would not be what it is today—a thriving and growing part of the Dubuque community."

A grand opening of the new facility was held in April 2009 on the business' three year anniversary. Unified Therapy Services occupies 8,800 square feet, which includes 9 private treatment rooms, a large gym, and a simulated apartment. They have added new programs and services, including more pediatric equipment, Interactive Metronome, and Social Skills Camps. Kelly and Gina continually assess the needs of their community and its surrounding areas and have worked hard to educate themselves and their gifted staff to meet those needs as they arise.

Unified Therapy Services' economic impact during its years of operation thus far has been phenomenal. Seventeen full-time jobs and seven part-time positions were created, with a payroll in excess of \$780,000 with insurance benefits. State withholding taxes in excess of \$65,000 and federal taxes in excess of \$100,000 were paid, and their business generated over \$1,250,000 in revenue. This economic impact can be expected to grow by 50% in the next few years with their proposed addition of a satellite clinic.



Gina and Kelly have also worked hard to make Unified Therapy Services a contributing member of the Dubuque community, participating in many Chamber of Commerce and multiple community events and activities. Their company's motto, "Together We Can Make A Difference", is evidenced by the impact their small business has had on Dubuque and its surrounding region.

**Along with Gina and Kelly's hard work and dedication being recognized by the Iowa SBDC, they were chosen as the 2011 Iowa Small Business Persons of the Year by the Small Business Administration. They were presented with their SBA award at the SMART Economic Development Conference in Des Moines on May 5, 2011.**



Presentation of the Small Business Administration's 2011 Iowa Small Business Persons of the Year Award on May 5, 2011. From L to R: Governor Terry Branstad, Award winners Gina Blean and Kelly Heysinger, Small Business Administration Region 7 Regional Administrator Patricia Brown-Dixon, and Iowa District Director Joe Folsom.

Be sure to check out Unified Therapy Services, Inc. at [www.unifiedtherapy.com](http://www.unifiedtherapy.com)