



**2009 State and Region X
Veterans Small Business Champion of the Year**

**Linda M. Jadwin, Director
South Sound Women's Business Center (SSWBC)
Tacoma, WA
<http://seattleccd.com/wbcmain/sswbc.htm>**

Linda Jadwin is a down-to-earth, high spirited, dedicated hardliner when it comes to helping budding entrepreneurs survive the ups and downs of business ownership. She blends practicality, credibility and creativity to each challenge she faces, and then draws on her vast

array of networks to solve problems and provide resources and services that are far beyond anything else out there. She addresses the needs of the community, partners with local business resource organizations, develops programs, finds funding, and implements access to those who seek entrepreneurship. The SSWBC covers Pierce, Thurston and Kitsap counties and strives to help women start and run successful businesses regardless of social or financial disadvantage, race, ethnicity or business background. It has expanded its reach with a new and dynamic program to serve veterans, thanks to Linda's efforts, experience, education, and expertise.

The veteran population is near and dear to Jadwin. As wife of a former military member, she understands the gap between what the government provides for servicemen and women and what they need to navigate through adjustments with military separation and the return to civilian life. One in four veterans is either unemployed or seriously underemployed four years after leaving military service. Many of these highly trained and talented individuals are burgeoning entrepreneurs - aspiring to take their concept and turn it into a functional business. Leveraging resources, Linda works closely with WA State Department of Veterans Affairs, Hire America's Heroes, Bates and Clover Park Technical Colleges to promote avenues for returning and retired veterans whether they seek to return to the workforce, change careers, or open their own businesses. The program she created for veterans who want to start their own businesses is called **VOTE** (Veterans Outreach for Training and Education).

"The VOTE program provides the resources, information, instruction and mentoring required to walk someone through the functional steps of starting a business and leads to the development of a business plan to be used to gain access to business financing. These priceless services are free of charge to the veterans or their spouses because Jadwin secured a grant from VetCorp and scholarships from various business partners to ensure that each veteran who attends can do so without economic hardship," says Nancy Porzio, Seattle District Director. "Linda's commitment to the Veteran population continues to grow with each new project."

Jadwin tirelessly seeks support, resources, partners and mentors from government officials, agencies, corporations and professional groups to better serve the veterans. She works with the Department of Veterans Affairs concerning the Veteran-owned business certification program. She supports the implementation of \$15 million set-aside dollars to enable veterans to participate in

Washington's Linked Deposit Program that enables vets to get loans at up to a two-percent interest rate reduction. Jadwin designed the VOTE program to pair this collage of technical assistance resources with Community Capital Development's lending unit that provides access to financing for disadvantaged entrepreneurs. Another VOTE benefit is a "Business Buddy" program that links potential and new veteran business owners with mentors - for the purpose of cross-promotion, marketing, and problem solving.

Jadwin has worked with the Phoenix Brigade at Fort Lewis to use her VOTE program to augment part of the base's occupation rehabilitation program that serves many of the wounded warriors of the brigade who are no longer able to return to their military careers and may find outside employment difficult or impossible. The soldiers or their spouses can participate in the VOTE program even though they may only be in Washington for a short time while they heal from wounds acquired during military service.

VOTE's inception in February 2008, over 158 veterans have attended workshops, 70 have engaged in follow-up counseling, and ten completed business plans and financing proposals prior to starting their own businesses. With six veterans obtaining financing with no outside funding needed. She also is working with the Department of Defense to create a virtual classroom so that the VOTE program can better serve inherently mobile military personnel. By going virtual, the VOTE program and counselors will be available wherever the soldier calls home.

Linda Jadwin's VOTE program bridged an opportunity gap for veterans who otherwise might have missed out on knowing important steps to starting their own business, on creating an effective business plan, and on acquiring the background and backing to follow their dreams.