

LAUNCH YOUR IDEA

By Ashley South

Lindsay Harmon. You will need to know this name if you have a great idea and don't know where to begin with launching a business. Lindsay is the Naperville Library business librarian in charge of NaperLaunch. The program is housed at the Nichols Library and has helped hundreds of entrepreneurs over the seven years of its existence.

Lindsay has worked for the Naperville Library for three years. She explains

that her prior experience was in academia at Lewis University. She and her family moved to Naperville when she landed the job. Like so many of us, she had no idea that NaperLaunch existed. She explained how unusual it is to have this resource. "Larger cities with bigger budgets do not have what we have here in Naperville at the Naperville Library. Our city has a dedicated department, a business librarian, and specifically allocated space for

entrepreneurs. We owe gratitude to the tenacity of Kent Palmer."

NaperLaunch Academy was just an idea in 2012. Known then as BiblioTech, was shaped into what it is today by Kent Palmer, a Naperville Library reference librarian with a unique resume, including a business degree, an advanced degree in Library Science, career coach and entrepreneur.

We spoke with Anne Bultman, Kent's supervisor in 2012. She tells us "Kent and I went to 1871 (Chicago startup incubation lab) and the Junto Institute to talk through the curriculum. We settled on five different topics: how to start a business in Illinois, developing a business visibility model, how to develop professional selling skills, how to write a business plan, and how to develop leadership." The library's marketing

department came up with the design and worked with Kent on pulling in documents online. BiblioTech was renamed to NaperLaunch and officially marketed in 2014.

Kent's experience coupled with his education and steadfast drive catapulted the program. First, Kent reached out to SCORE (more on page 22) and then the small business development center at College of DuPage. Equipped with established resources to get the program going, he moved onto solidifying the format of the roundtable sessions. After the speakers and facilitators were in place, NaperLaunch welcomed its first cohort. The partnerships have been enduring with the overall common goal to help the future of business.

With resources for support, people in classes, and a space to visit, a community

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has been established. There is a women's roundtable and two mastermind groups (set to a limited number of people whose businesses are operating and generating revenue). These peer groups form additional support and aid in business ideation.

NaperLaunch Academy provides a focused curriculum of eight workshops and two roundtable discussions that are provided in either a live or virtual, self-guided format. With a library card, you simply sign up. Everything is funded by tax dollars, making immediate out of

pocket costs zero. The rich trove of resources is all fully available, and appointments are available for one-on-one orientations. As Anne reminds us, "Most public libraries do not have what we are offering. Other libraries refer would-be entrepreneurs to Naperville."

NaperLaunch has seen many ideas "launch" over its seven years. Anne told of us an entrepreneur with a science background who brought a test to market that works with the invitro fertilization process to increase a couple's chance a of successful pregnancy. Another one that we love here at Main & Luxe, A Crate to Celebrate is the business of birthday parties in a box and is marketed to busy parents. The most visible success story is Mark Quigley, CEO and founder of Dezinger Software. His idea was to create a template to help startups with their business plans. He marketed the product to libraries as

a resource for resident entrepreneurs, and the product is being used by Naperville Library today! This is the baton that has now been passed to Lindsay. Kent retired in June and

being launched by the program. She is hyper focused on fostering our small-town flavor and aiding in business success.



Lindsay Harmon, Business Librarian, NaperLaunch

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has been traveling. His legacy is carried on by all those who have found success and guidance through NaperLaunch. Lindsay now has a chance to further the success of the businesses

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