

Solaris Tanning Spa

Becoming a new business owner is hard work, but that has not deterred Kim Ashley from owning her own shop. Ms. Ashley, 47, has always wanted to run her own business. Even though she has had her share of success working for others over the years, she decided that it was time for her to go out on her own and follow in her father's footsteps. Prior to starting her business Ms. Ashley had 15 years of experience in sales and sales management.

Ms. Ashley was introduced to the tanning industry through her daughter who came home elated after getting a spray-on tan at a spa a couple of years ago. Realizing that the spray-on tan was a new approach, she decided to research this industry thoroughly.

Over the next year, Ms. Ashley learned a great deal about the tanning industry, attended trade shows and conventions and visited many independent and franchise tanning salons. She began to develop her business plan and scout locations based on the key demographics of the industry. She decided to locate in Evanston near the Northwestern University campus because college students were one of her prime markets. In addition, the community had only one other tanning operation, and the community possessed disposable income levels necessary to make her business Solaris Tanning Spa profitable.

Ms. Ashley initially contacted the US Small Business Administration and met with a SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) representative for help. After taking their one day class on how to start a business, Ms. Ashley turned to the internet to get much of the information she needed for her business plan Ms. Ashley became certified in the industry at a trade show this year, so she could open her salon with a proper local health department license.

The company is targeting an “appearance conscious” consumer with disposable income that is interested in a year-round healthy looking tan and to relieve ever increasing stress. The principal clients (56%) are females 20-39 years of age. Seventy (70) percent of the clients nationally for tanning are between 18-48 years old.

Once the business plan was complete and she identified Evanston as the site of her salon, the SCORE representative encouraged her to speak with Greg Bula, Director of the Evanston Technology Innovation Center, an Illinois Small Business Development Center, for assistance in loan packaging. The Evanston Technology Innovation Center is one of the 40 Small Business Development Centers located around the state supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Greg reviewed Ms. Ashley's business plan and helped her identify a bank that would provide financing with a US Small Business Administration loan guarantee. Bank One will provide \$253,000 for this woman owned start up business, as a combination of a loan and line of credit to pay for tenant build out, remodeling and furniture, tanning beds and working capital. “Greg was a great asset” said Ms. Ashley

Solaris Tanning Spa plans to offer tanning services and tanning related products at a retail store located at 1932-34 Maple Avenue in Evanston. The shop is 1,750 square feet and is now in construction. Opening after the first of the year, it will hold up to 11 tanning beds and the spray-on tan booths. Ms. Ashley is looking forward to opening her doors this winter and is expecting great things from her new business.

The Evanston Technology Innovation Center is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network, working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Small Business Development Center and the US Small Business Administration.