

Pinnacle XL's Lyons learns strategies for global business growth

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The 6th of January will be graduation day for KeleMarie Lyons, owner of Milwaukee-based [Pinnacle XL](#) management consulting firm.

While Lyons won't be wearing the traditional cap and gown, she will be a graduate of the first class of the [U.S. Small Business Administration](#)'s Emerging 200 (E200) initiative. Lyons, 40, will have earned a new set of strategies to grow her global business to include China.

A \$5,000 grant from Wisconsin Department of Commerce that Lyons received while taking the course helped her translate her company brochures into Chinese and develop tabletop exhibits for a trade show held in Shanghai in November. From that event, Lyons said she was invited to pitch her business in February to one of the largest flexible packaging companies in China.

The E200 initiative began last March when 200 participants were chosen in 10 U.S. cities including Milwaukee, Boston, Baltimore, Atlanta, Memphis and Des Moines. Eric Ness, deputy director for the Wisconsin SBA, said the goal was to identify 20 central city businesses in each market that show a high potential for growth and provide them with the network, resources and motivation to build a sustainable business.

Located in an office suite at the YWCA of Greater Milwaukee at 1915 N. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Pinnacle XL met the criteria and Lyons was one of 20 accepted into the program.

Other central Milwaukee business participants included four roofing companies, two real estate developers, three engineering services firms and two construction companies. Of the 20 that began the program, 15 completed the course.

"I think they left this course with a better idea of what's going on in their business," said Ness, adding that several companies already have hired more employees as a result of the class.

E200 participants met every other week beginning in July for three hours, discussing everything from expanding their business to gaining more access to capital to working with government contractors. Mentors from the SBA's SCORE program, government agencies, nonprofits and executives in the private sector were brought in for mentoring and referrals. It was during a meeting



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with a SCORE representative that Lyons learned of the grant opportunities at the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

“Relationships have been initiated and they all told us to call them for anything,” Lyons said. “You feel like there’s an alliance of individuals and organizations that are there to help us get to the next level.”

With a staff of six part-time and two full-time employees, Pinnacle XL will bring in annual sales of just under \$1 million for the year, but Lyons expects that to grow 25 percent annually over the next 10 years, thanks in part to the E200 class.

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As a result, Lyons developed a strategy that included keeping Pinnacle a closely held private company, streamlining its mission to focus on providing integrated marketing and sales strategies, and developing a plan to get more heavily involved in China, Europe and Angola. Her 10-year strategic plan calls for 25 percent annual growth, with 10 percent of that coming from new business in China.

Lyons started Pinnacle XL in 2000 after working as part owner of [H2D Inc.](#), a Milwaukee marketing and design firm. Pinnacle’s domestic clients have included [Inland Cos.](#), [TDS Metrocom](#) and Comexi North America. Her international clients, which account for about 60 percent of sales, include businesses in Angola, England, Italy and Spain.

The international work started when a college friend and Angolan native began work in Angola in 2003 after that country’s civil war ended. His work focused on financial and accounting consulting, and Lyons formed a joint venture offering marketing and sales strategies.

Ness said the positive outcome of the program means the SBA will offer the class again in 2009.

“The best answer is talking with the entrepreneurs,” Ness said, “and they unanimously thought (the class) was a success.”