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ErieMade Business Academy Celebrates Graduation of Second Cohort

Insights gained from six-month program helped creative entrepreneurs grow personally and professionally

ERIE – Bridgeway Capital, with support from Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), celebrated Wednesday, July 27, the graduation of its second ErieMade Business Academy cohort. Thirteen creative entrepreneurs and small business owners graduated from the free six-month program, which helps support growth-oriented artists, designers, craftspeople and micro manufacturers through individualized instruction, peer group support and expertise.

In-person program sessions took place at [1020 Collective](#), an art and events space in downtown Erie owned by graduates of the 2022 ErieMade cohort. The three main program elements of ErieMade consisted of weekly workshops with optional study sessions, one-on-one business coaching and membership sponsorships to join 1020 Collective for a year, along with vendor market opportunities. After the eight intensive sessions, the cohort moved on to implementing their business plans.

[Amanda Duncan](#), a business consultant based in Erie and facilitator of ErieMade, leveraged her entrepreneurial expertise to teach a wide variety of topics during the in-person sessions, including marketing strategies and basic business operations. Duncan also provided one-on-one business coaching for participants, where they outlined goals and developed strategies to navigate obstacles to growth.

“The 13 participants that comprise ErieMade’s second cohort are exceptional business owners and talented artists,” Duncan said. “They were especially keen to develop relationships with one another, and it has been a joy to watch them support one another, share their successes and even establish collaborative projects together to create new, exciting products to offer their customers. I can’t wait to continue this journey with them through the end of the year and identify ways they can grow along this path.”

“It’s clear from the participant feedback that Amanda Duncan and the 1020 Collective were amazing ErieMade partners for Bridgeway,” said Adam Kenney, managing director of programs, Bridgeway Capital. “For ErieMade’s second phase, we continue to collaborate to help these creatives activate new skills and bring their plans to life.”

Chelsea Fox, owner of Fox Den Design Shop, said the ErieMade Business Academy not only inspired her as an entrepreneur but also rekindled her passion for creativity and design.



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“ErieMade proved to be a transformative experience, providing me with new-found motivation, insights and strategies to enhance both my personal growth and the development of my small business,” Fox said. “I realized that my journey is a canvas, and I have the power to paint it with vibrant colors, bold designs and unique concepts. I am excited to apply the insights and strategies acquired from the class to propel Fox Den Design Shop to new heights.”

Sarah Jacobs, owner of Sarah Jacobs Art, said the program empowered her to move her business forward. Since starting at ErieMade, Jacobs’ business has become an LLC, she hired a part-time assistant and has the knowledge to move her business in the right direction. She said her career is now focused, organized and growing out of state.

Darlene Alfieri started Floral Expressions by Darlene in 2020 and soon realized she understood very little about the behind-the-scenes aspects of owning a business – especially doing so during a global pandemic.

“The day-to-day operations of running a flower shop were easy,” Alfieri said. “But there’s so much more to it than that. The ErieMade program helped me understand the backside to business ownership – financing, marketing, branding and more. I leave here feeling like I can do this with the help of others, and I’ve made friends along the way who, like me, want to make our communities a little brighter doing something we’re passionate about.”

To learn more about the ErieMade Business Academy and its 2023 cohort, visit bridgewaycapital.org/eriemade.

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About Bridgeway Capital

Bridgeway Capital is a mission-driven lender, a nonprofit alternative to banks that lends to small businesses, nonprofits and real estate projects that have a positive community impact. As a Community Development Financial institution (CDFI), Bridgeway is certified by the U.S. Treasury. Since 1990, Bridgeway has invested more than \$250 million in communities across the region, with over 90% of the funding provided to low-income communities. As a social impact investor, Bridgeway focuses on equitable economic growth in underserved areas by providing impact-driven lending and programs to grow businesses and revitalize places. For more information, visit www.bridgewaycapital.org.