

## Lighting the Way to Business Growth

**F**luffy white corn bounces about a steel drum and fills the room with a “Pop!” “Pop!” “Pop!” Soon, the unmistakable smell of pina colada wafts through the air.

Popcorn and paradise. The two go hand-in-hand at Kernel Coladas Gourmet Popcorn in Columbia City.

Lindsey Hively launched the company in 2008 with her father, Gary. At the time, she was a freshman at Indiana University studying entrepreneurship.

“The theme is all Hawaiian and tropical,” she declares. “I thought, ‘Why not put something fun in the middle of Northeast Indiana?’ ”

Today, business is popping.

Hively credits the GreenLight program – offered through the Whitley County Economic Development Corporation’s Small Business & Entrepreneurship Initiative (SBEI) – with helping to accelerate growth.

“Too many times I found myself working *in* the business rather than *on* the business,” she reflects. “We’ve been taking steps to make sure I work on those things that will move us forward rather than just getting us by every day.”

Bruce Stach, SBEI program manager, says GreenLight helps entrepreneurs “look before they leap” – whether they’re striving to start a business, expand or change their focus.

The program has three phases: an initial screening, strategic planning sessions (participants conduct a SWOT analysis, develop a formal business strategy and more) and final benchmark assessment.

“We ask them to describe their core competencies,” Stach explains. “What are they good at? What are they not so good at?”

“We also go through the process of defining: What are they trying to accomplish – and what are the greatest risks in accomplishing that? How well do they understand their market?”

In addition to one-on-one coaching, GreenLight provides important connections.

**Bruce Stach, Small Business & Entrepreneurship Initiative program manager, shares business tips with Kernel Coladas owner Lindsey Hively. The GreenLight program is free for Whitley County residents.**



**Let the fun begin! Sarah Roebel, production manager at Kernel Coladas Gourmet Popcorn, prepares a batch of bite-size goodies at the company’s Columbia City facility.**

“In some cases, we’ll work with a client and recognize, ‘This other client has an opportunity to solve your needs,’” Stach reflects.

“Generally, small companies don’t know what’s out there. We help connect the dots to other (resources) in the state or region that they simply don’t know exist.”

Ultimately, GreenLight feedback assists entrepreneurs in deciding whether to move forward with their ideas, change course or put on the brakes.

### As you like it

Kernel Coladas has five employees and offers approximately 30 popcorn flavors.

Customers can whet their palate with the taste of peanut butter and jelly, s’mores, birthday cake, strawberry cheesecake, buffalo hot wings, pizza and more.

“My most popular flavor is dill pickle popcorn,” Hively reveals. “(We offer) fun, crazy, different things you can’t get anywhere.”

She anticipates that wedding sales will become Kernel Coladas’ biggest market and says that the company’s ability to customize offerings is one of its biggest strengths.

“I don’t want to stay a small business. I’d really like to grow and be able to provide jobs for Whitley County and Northeast Indiana as a whole. (GreenLight) opened up a lot of doors for meeting new people and people who can help me achieve my goals.”

At the time of this writing, GreenLight had assisted nearly 40 clients.

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Lindsey Hively, Kernel Coladas Gourmet Popcorn, at [www.kernelcoladaspopcorn.com](http://www.kernelcoladaspopcorn.com)

Bruce Stach, SBEI GreenLight, at [www.whitleyedc.com](http://www.whitleyedc.com)